

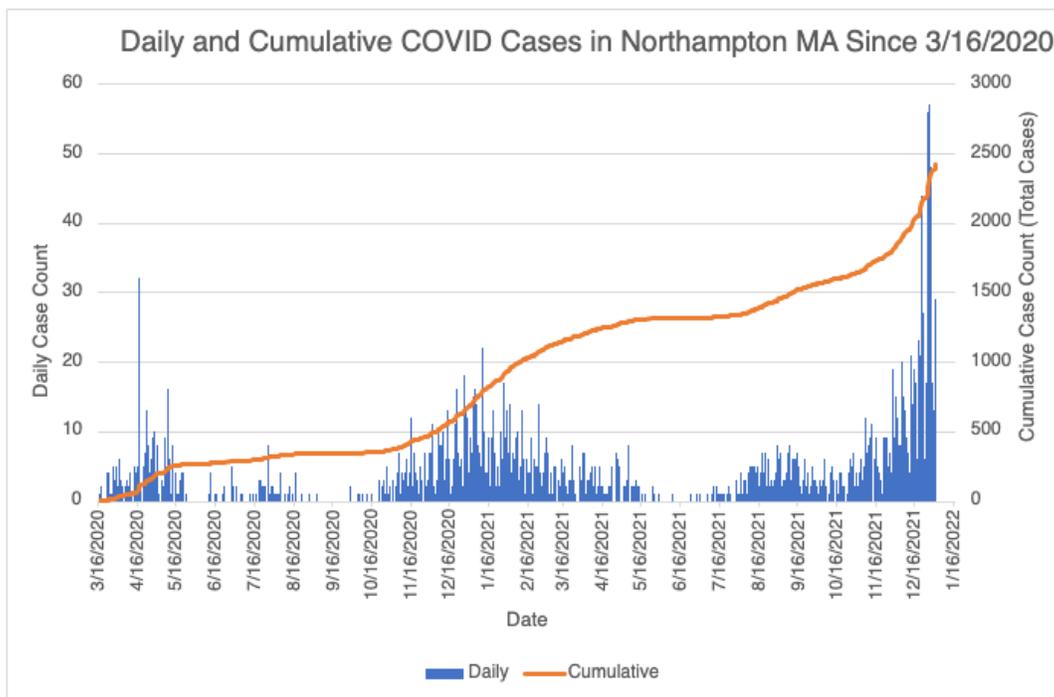


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## Northampton Health Department and Northampton Board of Health COVID-19 Health Advisory

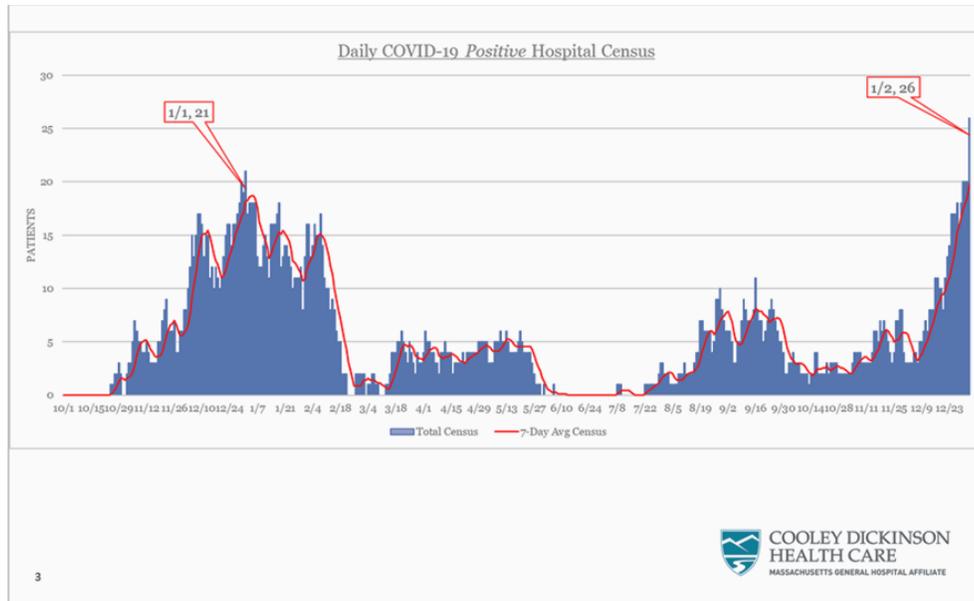
The Northampton Health Department reports 355 COVID-19 cases in the past 14 days (12/20/2021 to 1/2/2022). The incident rate for COVID-19 infection in Northampton is 90 cases per day per 100,000 people.



The COVID-19 test positivity rate in Massachusetts was 18.42% on 12/30/2021 (this positivity rate is based on molecular tests such as PCR tests only, and does not include proctored or home-based antigen tests). For comparison, the peak positivity rate at the height of the winter 2020-2021 surge was 8.55%, and the peak positivity rate at the height of the Delta variant surge in the fall was 2.9%.

COVID-19 hospitalizations are rising along with infections, and are overwhelming our healthcare systems. The healthcare burden is associated with increasing COVID-19 inpatients, lack of

available beds, and lack of healthcare personnel due in part to infections among staff. On January 1, 2022, Baystate Medical Center reported surpassing 200 inpatients with COVID-19. On January 3, 2022, Cooley Dickinson Hospital reported 25 inpatients with COVID-19, up from 18 reported on January 1, 2022. This is the highest census of COVID-19 patients CDH has ever experienced.



Northampton’s Public Health Director Merridith O’Leary states, “Our cases and hospitalizations are substantially higher than they have been at any point during the pandemic, and they continue to climb. While most people will have mild or moderate symptoms and will not require hospitalization, as a community we need to try to decrease transmission to protect the most vulnerable among us, reduce the burden on and stabilize our healthcare system, and ensure a continued workforce in general.”

The transmissibility of the Omicron variant is extremely high, and most indoor activities carry significant risk for exposure to COVID-19. We recommend the public take increased precautions during this heightened phase of the pandemic.

1. Get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible if you have not done so already. If you are eligible for a booster vaccine, get a booster vaccine as soon as possible. Vaccination is the most effective means to reduce the risk of severe infection, hospitalization, and death.
2. Stay home as much as possible.
3. Refrain from unnecessary indoor social activities with people from other households, including family members who do not live with you. Take particular care in socializing with those with high risk of complications of COVID, such as the elderly and those with

immunocompromising or other conditions that increase risk for severe infection.

4. If you have new symptoms of illness, no matter how mild, stay home and get tested: <https://northamptonma.gov/2392/Local-Testing-Sites>. We recognize that testing availability is not meeting the demand of new cases and you may not have timely access to testing if you have been exposed or are having symptoms. When in doubt, stay home if you have been exposed and/or have symptoms.
5. If you test positive, have new symptoms and have not yet had a test, or have been exposed to COVID, follow the CDC and Massachusetts Department of Public Health guidelines: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/isolation-and-quarantine-guidance-for-the-general-public>

Note that people with COVID-19 are considered infectious for 2 days prior to the onset of infection (first day of symptoms or first positive test date, whichever occurs first)

6. If you only have access to home antigen tests, make sure you adhere to manufacturer directions to increase accuracy of results. Children under 15 years old as well as adults with certain physical, cognitive, or other disabilities should have the test performed for them. Most home antigen tests have minimum age restrictions (eg. 2 years old), please read manufacturer directions carefully. Be advised that positive test lines may appear very faint; inspect the testing strip closely at the end of the 15-minute or other manufacturer-specified testing time period.
7. If you are at risk of severe disease and have new symptoms or exposure, be sure to alert your health care provider as soon as possible. Treatments may be available to decrease one's risk of severe disease and hospitalization, but they need to be administered early in the course of disease.
8. If you need to be in an indoor public setting, wear a high quality mask that fits over your nose and mouth snugly AND that provides good filtration of virus particles. Examples include N-95, KN-95, and a cotton mask (for fit) over a surgical mask (for improved filtration). Adding eye protection such as glasses or a face shield can add protection.
9. Clean your hands with soap and water, or with hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol after touching high-touch surfaces in public such as doorknobs, handles, etc.