

## Weekly COVID-19 report

**45,309 cases**  
(up 600)

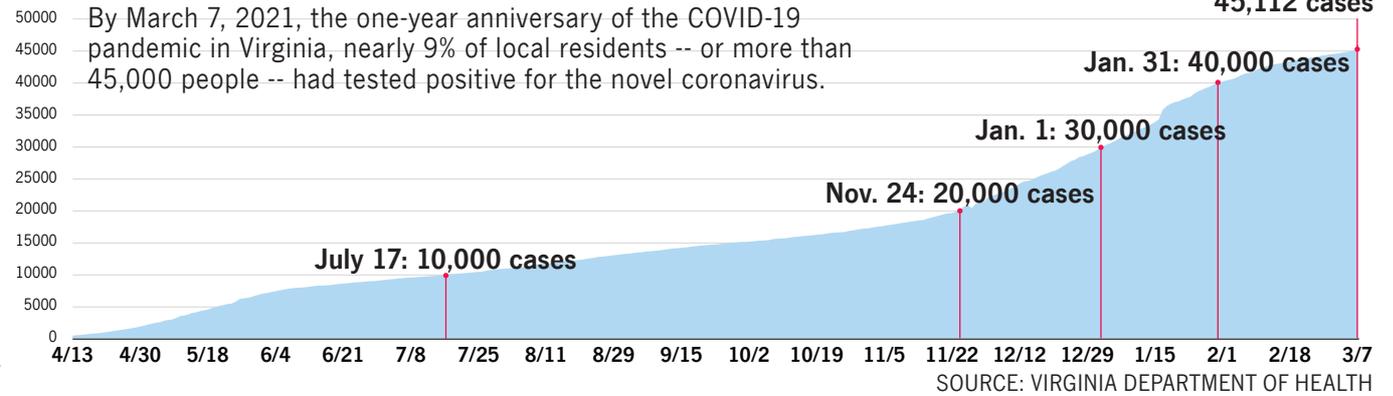
**1,671 hospitalizations**  
(up 52)

**513 deaths**  
(up 20)

**6.8% percent-positivity rate**  
(down from 8.2%)

**Note:** Numbers are current as of Wednesday, March 10. The numbers in red were added between March 4-10.

## COVID-19 pandemic – one year later



### RECOVERY, from page 1

Amanda Phommachanh said she initially kept quiet about her husband's illness because she didn't want to alarm the community. But after Titou was placed on the ventilator, she decided the situation was bad enough to make a public plea for help.

"By Saturday afternoon, we didn't have the test results and there was nothing we could do to get them. ... That's when I knew it was bad," Amanda Phommachanh recalled in an interview Monday. "Without the results, [the doctors] could only treat the symptoms he was having. They didn't know to treat the cytokine storm" that was making him so sick.

At the urging of some friends, Amanda Phommachanh made a Facebook video in which she described her husband's plight and begged for help from elected officials to help find out what happened to her husband's test.

Local TV news stations re-broadcast the video and before long, someone from Gov. Ralph Northam's office reached out to offer help. That was also the first time many in Prince William County had heard of Titou Phommachanh and his struggle with COVID-19. The family's plight put a local face on the scary reality of the still-new pandemic. If COVID-19 could strike a Manassas dad in his 40s, it could happen to anyone.

### A different world

Although Titou Phommachanh became critically ill with COVID-19, he was ultimately one of the lucky ones. Soon after his new test came back positive, the doctors called Amanda Phommachanh to the hospital, and they made a plan for his treatment.

Titou Phommachanh was eligible for the anti-viral drug Remdesivir, which his doctors administered as soon as it arrived at the hospital. He was the first patient at Inova Fairfax to receive the drug for COVID-19, his doctor, Erik Osbourne, told reporters from ABC News' "Nightline."

When Titou Phommachanh's condition took a turn for the worse, his doctors also placed him on an ECMO machine to give his diseased lungs a break. The machine, referred to by the acronym "extracorporeal membrane oxygenation," is used when all other forms of heart and lung support have failed for critically ill patients, according to the Extracorporeal Life Support Organization's website.

Slowly, the treatments worked. After Titou Phommachanh began receiving Remdesivir, he stopped getting worse, Amanda Phommachanh said.

Titou Phommachanh remained on the ventilator for 15 days, from March 12 to March 27, 2020 before he was well enough to be taken off the machine and allowed to wake up.

Now, nearly a year later, Titou Phommachanh says he clearly remembers what it was like to regain consciousness for the first time in a completely different reality than the one he left when he entered the hospital. He said he remembers being all alone in his hospital room, seeing everyone in masks and full personal protective equipment, and being able to talk to his doctor only through a glass window.

"When I went in, I really didn't know it was COVID. It wasn't confirmed or really even discussed," Titou Phommachanh said Monday. "... It certainly was a different world that I was waking up to."

Amanda Phommachanh recalled first hearing her husband's voice on the telephone when he called her for the first time. She said she was out on a walk with their three girls, Sofie, 10, Macy, 8, and Hannah, 7. The hospital staff had told her earlier that day they were preparing to take him off the respirator but she didn't know exactly when.

"He said, 'What happened?'" Amanda Phommachanh recalled of their first conversation. "It was a huge relief to hear his voice."

Amanda Phommachanh said she remembers that her husband's voice sounded raspy and his British accent was more pronounced. Titou's family immigrated from Laos to the United Kingdom in the 1970s, when he was 5 years old, and he came to the U.S. to go to college in the mid-1990s, he said.

Amanda Phommachanh said she initially tried to shield him from all that had happened since he fell ill. She didn't want him to know that everything had closed down, including the Capital Hilton where he worked, or that the girls were no longer going to school.

In the days after he fell ill, their eldest daughter, Sofie, ran a fever of 100.3 and tested positive for COVID-19. Amanda Phommachanh said she lost her sense of taste and smell, but at the time, it was not yet known that those were symptoms of COVID-19, and she was never tested.

Both she and Titou recently tested positive for antibodies to COVID-19, proving that she too became infected even though she never had any other symptoms.

Titou Phommachanh was released from the hospital on March 27, 2020. A local TV news crew captured the moment his doctors and nurses wheeled him out the front doors of Inova Fair-

fax, where he was greeted at the curb by a tearful Amanda. The cameras then followed them to their Manassas area home where they were eagerly welcomed by their three young girls.

Looking back on it now, Titou Phommachanh said he probably left the hospital too soon, but he was determined to get home to his family.

"They recommended going to some kind of rehabilitation facility first," he recalled Monday. "But I said, that's not gonna happen. I just wanted to go home."

### 'A light of hope'

Titou Phommachanh said he was so weak when he arrived home that he could barely take a few steps. Lifting a can of beans, he said, "felt like lifting 20 pounds." He lost about 50 pounds while he was in the hospital, but has slowly regained his strength and now feels mostly back to normal. His only lingering symptom, he said, is a tingling feeling in his hand. He's not sure what causes the sensation, but say it has gotten better over the past year.

He's still furloughed from his job, however. He was the Capital Hilton's director of catering, and although the hotel reopened last August, it's still not doing any large events. Washington, D.C. prohibited indoor dining when COVID-19 cases spiked over the holidays and reinstated it only recently. Indoor gatherings, however, are still extremely limited.

Titou Phommachanh says he and his wife have flipped their roles since he fell ill. She has returned to her work as a realtor, while he stays home with the girls. All three have returned to Prince William County's Pennington Traditional School on hybrid, two-day-a-week schedules and are doing well, their parents said.

Looking back on their ordeal, the Phommachanhs said they never

would have traveled to New York for the weekend getaway they took at the end of February 2020 if they knew then that the novel coronavirus had begun spreading there. Although they enjoyed meeting friends, catching "Wicked" on Broadway and visiting the 9-11 Memorial and museum, they are now convinced they caught the virus in New York City.

Despite already having COVID-19, both are still careful about following the safety protocols. They wear masks outside their home, haven't yet eaten inside a restaurant and still won't go to the grocery store as a family to limit their exposure to the virus.

The trauma of COVID-19 has imparted important lessons, both said, including that tomorrow is not guaranteed, "even though that sounds kind of cliché," Amanda Phommachanh said.

Titou Phommachanh said he realized it really does take a village to endure a traumatic illness and that it's important for family members to take an active role in their loved one's treatment. Both said they are forever grateful to Titou's sister, Nouly, who dropped everything to move in with their family and care for their girls when Titou fell ill.

"Do whatever you need to do to make sure your loved ones get the care they need," Titou Phommachanh said.

Finally, Titou Phommachanh said he believes his story gave people a sense of hope early in the pandemic that people could recover even from the most severe cases of COVID-19.

"COVID has been a scary thing for everybody," he said. "I was just glad I was able to be a light of hope for some people -- to offer another ending to this story."

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