

The Daily Progress

WINNER OF THE 2018 PULITZER PRIZE FOR BREAKING NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY



THUNDERSTORM 80 • 67 FORECAST, A2 | **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2021** | Charlottesville, Virginia | dailyprogress.com

Kids in hospital with COVID hits record high in state

ERIC KOLENICH AND JOHN RAMSEY
Richmond Times-Dispatch

The number of children in Virginia hospitalized with COVID is surging. Last week, at least 252 were in Virginia hospitals either positive for the virus or suspected of having it, according to federal data. That's the highest figure since the pandemic began, and it's five times higher than the start of July.

The increase in serious illness suggests that children are no longer immune to the virus' most serious symptoms. And it comes at a time when schools are re-opening and students ineligible for vaccination are packing into classrooms.

"Now we're seeing children

who are coming in with pneumonia and the need for oxygen," said Dr. Suzanne Lavoie, a Virginia Commonwealth University infectious diseases specialist and professor of pediatrics and internal medicine. "It's very serious."

Early in the pandemic, many believed one silver lining was that young children were spared. They might test positive, but they rarely developed harsh symptoms. Some did suffer severe illness from Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome as a result of COVID. There have been 83 cases in the state. Teenagers were slightly more susceptible to COVID.

But that hopefulness no longer appears true. In the past two months, young children and teens

have entered hospitals with low oxygen levels, pneumonia, cough and respiratory failure—the same symptoms adults have presented since March 2020.

Early on, youths accounted for about 5% of all positive cases at VCU Health, Lavoie said. Last week, that figure had ballooned to 15%. The ages run the gamut. Lavoie recently saw patients as young as 15 months and as old as 17 years.

There have been more than 33,000 COVID cases in Virginia since July 1 among people ages 0-19, according to data from the state health department. (State data includes kids up to age 19.) Though the pandemic has stretched 18 months now, one in

four pediatric cases has occurred in the past 10 weeks.

There are at least three reasons why kids with COVID are more likely to get seriously ill: the delta variant, a lack of vaccinations and schools reopening.

"It's probably a combination of all those things," Lavoie said.

Doctors believe the delta variant affects kids worse than the original strain. A higher percentage of kids who test positive are displaying symptoms, and those symptoms are more severe. That exact cause remains unknown.

One possible reason is that the viral load of the delta variant is higher, so when people pass the disease from one person to another, they are passing more of it

than before, the doctor added.

Fewer vaccinations in young kids and teens likely play a role, too. Children under the age of 12 aren't eligible for vaccination yet because the Food and Drug Administration hasn't given approval. The FDA could sanction the Pfizer vaccine for children 5-11 as early as next month.

Among adolescents 12-17 in Virginia, 64% are fully vaccinated, which is below the adult rate of 74%.

Some parents chose not to vaccinate their children under the now negated notion that children don't need to be vaccinated. But everyone who can get one should

Please see **COVID**, Page A3



ANDREW SHURTLEFF, THE DAILY PROGRESS

SHOPPING SPREE

Contestant Chief Hezedeon Smith with the Charlottesville Fire Department races off to fill his cart during the Shop to Stop Hunger event Thursday at Kroger. Participants race against the clock and each fill their carts with as much food as possible. The event raises awareness about hunger and results in hundreds of pounds of food donated to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, courtesy of Kroger. Home Instead Senior Care is a co-sponsor of the event. The food bank has been holding Shop to Stop Hunger events since 2013, leading to more than 453,000 meals for neighbors in need.

UVa Health adds medical equity as key goal in 10-year plan

BRYAN MCKENZIE
bmckenzie@dailyprogress.com
(434) 978-7271

University of Virginia Health officials are working on a 10-year plan they hope will set a course of expanding medical facilities across the state, stimulating more research and providing health care in underserved communities.

The plan is part of UVa's overall 2030 strategic plan, which was finalized in 2019 but was put on hold pending the arrival of Dr. K. Craig Kent, the health system's chief executive officer. Kent joined UVa Health in February 2020, arriving along with the pandemic.

"The expectation was that the health system would soon follow with a plan and three weeks later we were in the middle of COVID. That's when I started my adventure here," Kent said.

The strategic plan will guide the near future of the health system's three basic functions of research, teaching and clinical care, but it this year it adds an important fourth goal—providing medical equity in the community.

"UVa Health has never had a strategic plan that looks at all four missions, and our goal is to find ways to connect them," Kent said. "For instance, our researchers create better treatments for disease and that leads to providing better clinical care."

Please see **UVA HEALTH**, Page A6

Dying to be green? You'll be able to soon in Albemarle

ALLISON WRABEL
awrabel@dailyprogress.com
(434) 978-7261

A green cemetery can soon start offering natural burials in Albemarle County.

The county Board of Supervisors late Wednesday night approved a special-use permit that allows the owners of Panorama Farms to add a natural burial ground to their property.

Green burials do not use embalming, have no plastic liners, concrete vaults or exotic wood caskets and do not have plastic memorials. Instead, they use biodegradable containers, and gravesites are marked with flat stones or native plantings.

They have been slowly becoming popular options for people who want the skip the expense or the heavy environ-

mental impact of traditional burials of cremations. Standard cremations, which have become increasingly popular in the U.S., spew as much as 800 pounds of carbon dioxide and sometimes mercury vapor from silver tooth fillings into the air. In addition, the energy used to produce the flames uses as much energy as a 500-mile car trip.

"I will admit that I did not

know very much, if anything really, about natural burial grounds like this," Supervisor Diantha McKeel said. "I'm really excited about it, and I think it's fascinating."

Chris Murray, a member of the family that owns the property in Earlysville, said they are continuing to try to keep the farm

Please see **GREEN**, Page A7

An Official Ballot Drop Box sits outside of the Fifth Street Albemarle County Office Building in 2020. **DAILY PROGRESS FILE**



Early voting begins today

ALLISON WRABEL AND GINNY BIXBY
awrabel@dailyprogress.com
vbixby@dailyprogress.com

Voters in Charlottesville and Albemarle County may cast their ballots starting Friday.

The state now allows no-excuse voting by mail and early voting and early in-person voting, starting Friday and ending the Saturday before the election.

Albemarle voters can cast an early ballot at the 5th

Street County Office Building at 1600 Fifth Street, while voters in Charlottesville can vote early at the city's election office at the City Hall Annex at 120 7th St. NE.

The deadline to register or change registration information in either locality is 5 p.m. Oct. 12.

At the top of the ticket, Democratic former Governor Terry McAuliffe, Republican Glenn Youngkin and Liberation Party candi-

date Princess Blanding are running for governor

Republican Winsome Sears is running against Democrat Hala S. Ayala for lieutenant governor.

Democratic Attorney General Mark R. Herring is seeking re-election against Republican Jason S. Miyares.

All House of Delegates seats in the area are up for election and have contested

Please see **VOTING**, Page A6

CLASSIFIEDS
COMICS
ENTERTAINMENT

B7 LOCAL & STATE
B6 NATION & WORLD
B5 OBITUARIES

A3 OPINION
A4 SCOREBOARD
A7 SPORTS

A5
B2
B1

