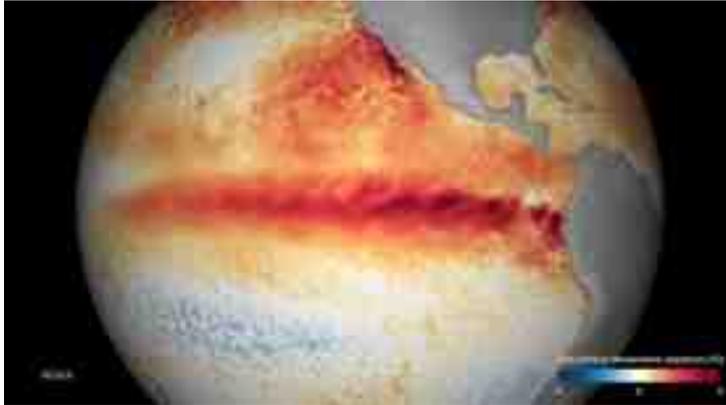


El Niño Strengthening, Will Be among Biggest on Record, WMO Says

U.N. weather agency says current warming pattern in the Pacific likely to be in the top-three strongest on record

 **REUTERS**
November 16, 2015



El Niño conditions normally reach maximum strength between October and January, then persist through much of the first quarter

Credit: [NOAA](#)
By Tom Miles

GENEVA, Nov 16 (Reuters) - The El Niño weather pattern, a phenomenon associated with extreme droughts, storms and floods, is expected to strengthen before the end of the year and become one of the strongest on record, the U.N. weather agency said on Monday.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said this El Niño was already "strong and mature" and the biggest in more than 15 years.

The phenomenon is driven by warm surface water in the eastern Pacific Ocean, and this time three-month averages will peak at more than 2 degrees Celsius above normal, putting this El Niño in the same league as those seen in 1972-73, 1982-83 and 1997-98, the WMO said.

"Right now we say we think it's really going to be one of the three strongest ones, it may be one of the two, that we don't know yet. But definitely it's already a very strong one," WMO Secretary-General Michel Jarraud told a news conference.

He said the world was better prepared for this El Niño than before, and the worst-affected countries were planning for the impact on agriculture, fisheries, water and health, and implementing disaster management campaigns to save lives and minimise economic damage.

"However, this event is playing out in uncharted territory. Our planet has altered dramatically

because of climate change, the general trend towards a warmer global ocean, the loss of Arctic sea ice and of over a million sq km of summer snow cover in the northern hemisphere," Jarraud said.

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"So this naturally occurring El Niño event and human-induced climate change may interact and modify each other in ways which we have never before experienced. Even before the onset of El Niño, global average surface temperatures had reached new records. El Niño is turning up the heat even further."

Heatwaves would be hotter and more frequent and more places would be at risk of flooding, Jarraud said, while the most severe storms -- equivalent to category 4 and 5 hurricanes -- would occur more often.

In addition, rising sea levels mean tsunamis and storm surges will have greater reach and inflict more damage when they hit land, Jarraud said.

El Niño conditions normally reach maximum strength between October and January, then persist through much of the first quarter.

"We anticipate that the El Niño will peak over the next few months and will progressively -- when we go towards May, June, July, when we go to the second quarter of next year -- will go more towards neutral conditions," Jarraud said.

(Reporting by Tom Miles; Editing by Kevin Liffey and Janet Lawrence)

El Nino weather: Worries grow over humanitarian impact

By Matt McGrath

Environment correspondent

1 hour ago

From the section

[Science & Environment](#)

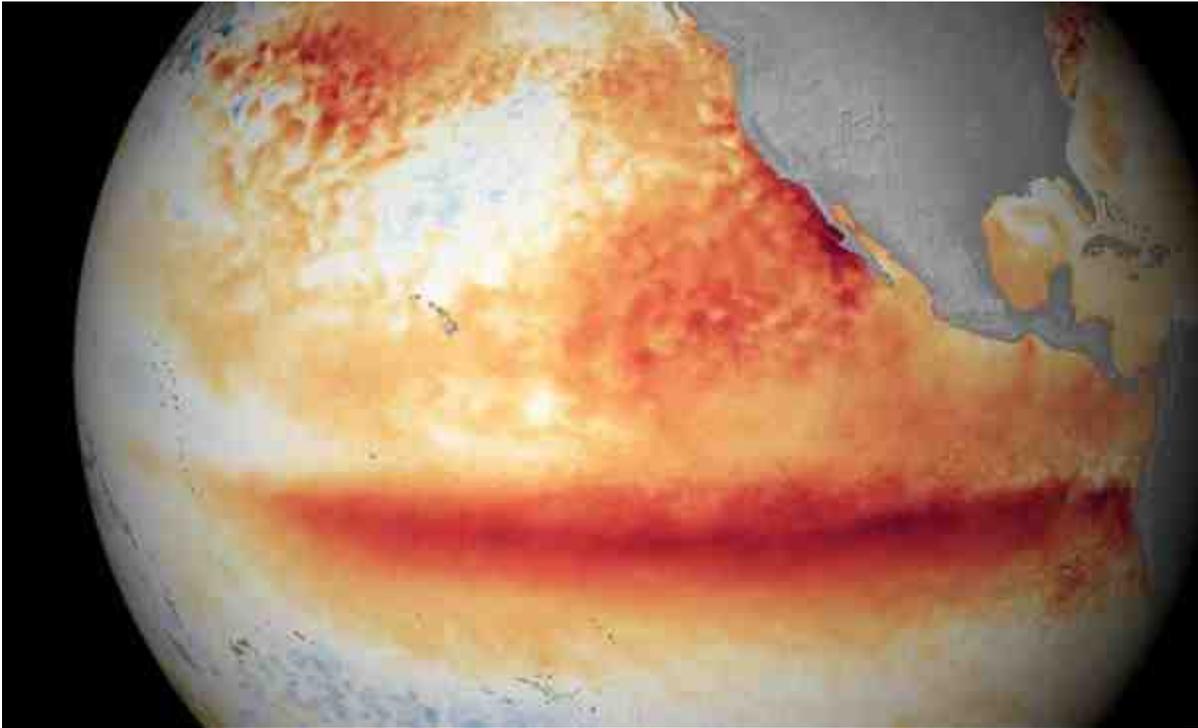


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Image caption

El Niño has contributed to making 2015 the warmest year on record and will continue to influence temperatures in 2016

The strongest El Niño weather cycle on record is likely to increase the threat of hunger and disease for millions of people in 2016, aid agencies say.

The weather phenomenon is set to exacerbate droughts in some areas, while increasing flooding in others.

Some of the worst impacts are likely in Africa with food shortages expected to peak in February.

Regions including the Caribbean, Central and South America will also be hit in the next six months.

This periodic weather event, which tends to drive up global temperatures and disturb weather patterns, has helped **push 2015 into the record books as the world's warmest year.**



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Image caption

Lula Derar, who lives in the Ethiopian village of Gurgur, says this is a very challenging time

"By some measures this has already been the strongest El Nino on record. It depends on exactly how you measure it," said Dr Nick Klingaman from the University of Reading.

"In a lot of tropical countries we are seeing big reductions in rainfall of the order of 20-30%. Indonesia has experienced a bad drought; the Indian monsoon was about 15% below normal; and the forecasts for Brazil and Australia are for reduced monsoons."

As both droughts and floods continue, the scale of the potential impacts is worrying aid agencies. Around 31 million people are said to be facing food insecurity across Africa, a significant increase over the last year.

Around a third of these people live in Ethiopia where 10.2 million are projected to require humanitarian assistance in 2016.

What is El Nino?

El Nino is a naturally occurring weather episode that sees the warm waters of the central Pacific expand eastwards towards North and South America.

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Media caption

Meteorologist Chris Fawkes explains what El Nino is

It was originally recognised by fishermen off the coast of South America in the 1600s with the appearance of unusually warm water in the Pacific Ocean. El Nino

translates as Little Boy, or Christ Child.

The phenomenon, which happens every two to seven years, usually peaks late in the calendar year, although the effects can persist well into the following spring and last up to 12 months.

El Nino is part of what is known as the El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle - the opposite phase of the cycle is called La Nina. La Nina is sometimes referred to as the cold phase and El Nino the warm phase

The current El Nino episode is the strongest event since 1998 and is expected to be among the three most powerful ever recorded. According to the WMO, the peak three month average water surface temperatures in tropical Pacific are expected to exceed 2C above normal.

Video: El Nino - what is it?

Strongest El Nino since 1950 on the way

Matt McGrath: 'High impacts' from globally stronger El Nino

The UK's Department for International Development says (DfID) it is providing emergency support for 2.6 million people and 120,000 malnourished children. It says it will provide 8 million people with food or cash support from January 2016. "If we fail to act now against this especially powerful El Nino, we will fail vulnerable people across our world," UK International Development Minister Nick Hurd said in a statement.

"Ensuring security for those affected by El Nino is important to their countries but also in Britain's national interest. Only by protecting and stabilising vulnerable countries can we ensure people are not forced to leave their homes in search of food or a new livelihood."

According to the UN, **around 60 million people have been forced to leave their homes** because of conflict.



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Image caption

43 year old Bokor Mussa lost 13 cattle in the drought in Ethiopia

Aid agencies like Oxfam are worried that the impacts of the continuing El Nino in 2016 will add to existing stresses such as the wars in Syria, South Sudan and Yemen.

They say that food shortages are likely to peak in Southern Africa in February with Malawi estimating that almost three million people will require humanitarian assistance before March.

Drought and erratic rains have affected two million people across Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. More floods are expected in Central America in January.

"Millions of people in places like Ethiopia, Haiti and Papua New Guinea are already feeling the effects of drought and crop failure," said Jane Cocking, from Oxfam.

"We urgently need to get help to these areas to make sure people have enough food and water.

"We cannot afford to allow other large-scale emergencies to develop elsewhere. If the world waits to respond to emerging crises in southern Africa and Latin America, we will not be able to cope," she said.

While many parts of the developing world will more directly feel the ongoing impacts of El Nino, the developed world will see impacts on food prices.

"It takes some time for the impacts of El Nino to feed through to social and economic systems," said Dr Klingaman.

"Historically food prices have gone up by 5%-10% for staples. Crops like coffee and rice and cocoa and sugar tend to be particularly affected."



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Getty Images

Image caption

Floods that hit Kenya in 2015 were blamed on El Nino

The El Nino event is likely to tail off into the spring - but that may not be good news either.

El Ninos are often followed by La Nina events, which can have opposite but similarly harmful effects. Scientists say during an El Nino there is a huge transfer of heat from the ocean to the atmosphere. Normally, as in 1997/98, that heat transfer tends to be followed by a cooling of the ocean, a La Nina event,

"It's possible but far from certain that this time next year we could be talking about the reverse of many of these impacts," said Dr Klingaman.

"In places where we are seeing droughts from El Nino, we could be seeing flooding from La Nina next year.

"It's just as disruptive, it's just the other way round."

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