

El Niño Comeback Ahead: What It Means for the Rest of 2026

After months of cooler ocean conditions shaping weather around the globe, a major shift is now underway.

Scientists say the current La Niña pattern is fading fast, and something very different is on the horizon.

According to the latest update from the Climate Prediction Center, “a transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral is expected in the next month,” signaling the end of the current phase that has influenced weather since last year.

For us everyday Americans, that means the atmosphere is entering a temporary calm period before a likely flip in the opposite direction.

From La Niña to Neutral

La Niña has been marked by cooler-than-normal ocean temperatures in the Pacific. That trend held steady into February, with “below-average sea surface temperatures persisting in the east-central equatorial Pacific Ocean.”

But signs of change are already building beneath the surface.

Scientists report that ocean heat is rising below the surface, a key signal that the system is preparing to shift. At the same time, wind patterns and storm activity are beginning to loosen their grip on the La Niña pattern.

In simple terms, the engine driving La Niña is running out of fuel.

Forecasters now say ENSO-neutral conditions are most likely through early summer, with a “55% chance” of neutral

conditions lasting from May through July.



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El Niño Likely by Summer

After that, the pattern is expected to flip.

"In June-August 2026, El Niño is likely to emerge (62% chance) and persist through at least the end of 2026," the report states.

El Niño is the opposite of La Niña. Instead of cooler waters, the Pacific Ocean warms up, which can dramatically shift weather patterns across the globe.

That can mean wetter conditions in some regions, drought in others and an increase in extreme weather events.

While it is too early to know exactly how strong this El Niño will become, forecasters say there is "a 1-in-3 chance that it would be 'strong' during October-December 2026."

That is where the term "super El Niño" begins to enter the conversation.

What a Strong El Niño Could Mean

If a strong El Niño develops, it can have widespread impacts.

In the United States, that often means:

- Increased rainfall across the southern states
- Higher risk of flooding in certain regions
- Warmer winters in the northern U.S.
- Fewer Atlantic hurricanes due to increased wind shear

Globally, strong El Niño events have been linked to heat waves, crop disruptions and unusual storm patterns.

The current forecast stops short of guaranteeing a “super” event, but the building conditions are enough to keep scientists watching closely.

The report notes that rising subsurface heat and weakening trade winds are key reasons why “the increasing odds of El Niño are supported.”

Forecast Comes With Some Uncertainty

There is one important caveat.

Forecasts made during the spring are known to be less reliable, meaning there is still room for changes in how this develops.

La Niña is on its way out. Neutral conditions are next. And El Niño is increasingly likely to take over before the year is out.

For now, the world is entering a transition phase. What follows could shape weather patterns across the globe through the rest of 2026.

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