



Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology

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Press Release

Caribbean Urged to Prepare for Hotter, Drier Conditions as El Niño Develops

Barbados, April 21, 2026 – The Caribbean Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology (CIMH) and the University of the West Indies Climate Studies Group Mona (UWI CSGM) are urging governments, businesses, farmers, and households to prepare for potentially severe climate extremes as a developing El Niño is expected to bring hotter and drier conditions across the region in 2026 and 2027.

Dr. Cedric Van Meerbeeck, Climatologist at CIMH, warns that this El Niño event is likely to bring periods of reduced rainfall and increased humid heat, which can affect water availability and agriculture, and increase the likelihood of heat stress and dry conditions. Without adequate planning, the socio-economic impacts from cascading and compounding hazards will be significant.

Historically, El Niño is linked to severe droughts—such as those in 2009–2010 and 2014–2016—and also increases the risk of extreme heat, wildfires, and marine heatwaves that can trigger coral bleaching. Similar combined impacts were also observed during the record heat years of 2010, 2023, and 2024. Areas already experiencing drought, particularly in the Eastern Caribbean, may see slower recovery of water resources during the upcoming wet season, which could begin as early as May 2026.

Although El Niño is typically associated with quieter Atlantic hurricane seasons, Dr. Van Meerbeeck stresses that risk remains, as a single hurricane or intense rainfall event can cause significant damage, as demonstrated by Hurricane Andrew in The Bahamas (1992) and Tropical Storm Erika in Dominica (2015).

“What we are seeing in the forecasts is the emergence of a potential multi-hazard regime—where heat, drought, and marine impacts can occur together and reinforce each other,” said Professor Michael Taylor, Co-Director of UWI CSGM. “Our research has long pointed to these compound extremes as a serious threat to life and livelihoods in the Caribbean. With advance warning of a looming multi-hazard threat, preparedness is imperative—requiring coordinated and integrated action across and within sectors and a strong regional approach.”



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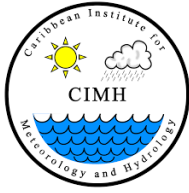
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This emerging pattern reflects a shift toward more complex, interconnected climate risks, affecting key sectors such as agriculture, water resources management, energy, and health. Reduced rainfall combined with elevated temperatures can lead to agricultural losses, affecting food security and rural livelihoods. Health risks may also increase, particularly in relation to water quality, vector-borne diseases, and heat-related illnesses. Water and energy systems may come under strain, as demand for cooling increases, especially in countries that rely on hydroelectric power or freshwater-cooled energy production.

Wider economic impacts linked to El Niño may also be felt, particularly in tourism, fisheries, and maritime transport. Given the region's reliance on imports, global disruptions associated with the El Niño can affect trade, logistics, and the procurement of goods and services. Governments are being urged to assess risks to supply chains, transportation networks, and key trade routes. For example, recent drought events have disrupted operations at the Panama Canal, a major transit point for goods entering the region and ports along the east coast of the USA. These disruptions can negatively affect regional food security and increase the cost of living.

As El Niño forecasts typically become more reliable from May onward, Dr. Van Meerbeeck urges stakeholders to stay updated on the evolving El Niño and its potential implications, noting that regional experts will continue monitoring conditions and providing timely updates.

He encourages decision-makers and the public to follow updates from the next Caribbean Climate Outlook Forum (CariCOF) organized by the CIMH, scheduled for the week of May 24. At the Forum regional climate experts and personnel from National Meteorological and Hydrological Services will engage with national, regional, and international stakeholders from climate-sensitive sectors to provide guidance ahead of the upcoming wet and hurricane season. Stakeholders are also encouraged to follow updates from their National Meteorological and Hydrological Services for country-specific information. For more information, please visit <http://rcc.cimh.edu.bb> or contact aapplewhaite@cimh.edu.bb.



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Emphasizing the importance of early awareness and preparedness, Principal of the CIMH, Dr. David Farrell highlights the role of timely, actionable climate information in supporting decision-making across the region, noting that “Proactive measures are vital for mitigating the impacts of extreme weather events on climate sensitive sectors, communities, and national economies.”

Dr. Farrell also underscores the CIMH’s commitment to enhancing regional resilience, noting that the Institute has strategically expanded its services to include a sharper focus on water, marine systems, earth observation, and climate, to support and advance all relevant early warning information services. He further notes that in recent years the CIMH has invested significant effort in examining how weather and climate related hazards such as El Niño produce cascading sectoral impacts that lead to socio-economic consequences across the region. This work helps to risk-inform the region’s climate adaptation programmes, which are key to building the region’s resilience to climate change and increasing climate variability.

He adds that strengthening early warning systems and access to clear, actionable information remains key to supporting preparedness across the region, and thanks regional governments and development partners for their support of CIMH’s programmes aimed at improving early warning systems.