

Quick guide and checklist: Preparing for El Niño

El Niño is a natural climate pattern that influences New Zealand's weather. Forecasts indicate the 2026 El Niño may be stronger than many previous events, increasing the likelihood of more extreme weather events and impacts. While impacts will vary across the country, now is a good time to review your plans and take practical steps to prepare.

[El Niño and La Niña | Earth Sciences New Zealand | NIWA](#)

What could this mean for your education setting?

Through spring and moving into summer, you may experience:



Severe weather and flooding

- Heavy rainfall and localised flooding
- Damage to buildings, grounds and outdoor areas
- Travel and transport disruptions



Strong winds

- Damage to buildings, trees and outdoor equipment
- Power outages and safety risks
- Disruption to normal operations



More heat events

- Hotter indoor learning environments
- Increased risk of dehydration and heat-related illness
- Changes to outdoor learning, play and recreation activities



Higher fire danger

- Fire restrictions affecting activities
- Smoke impacts on air quality
- Potential disruption, evacuation or temporary closure



Water shortages

- Water restrictions
- Pressure on drinking water supplies
- Challenges maintaining hygiene and sanitation requirements



Health and wellbeing potential impacts

- Increased stress and anxiety during prolonged or repeated events
- Greater impacts on vulnerable children, students and staff
- Additional pressure on families and whānau

Checklist to support preparedness

Use this checklist to help prepare your education setting for the months ahead. Some of these actions may not be applicable to your location or risk context:

Planning and Operations

- ☐ Review emergency and business continuity plans
- ☐ Confirm roles, responsibilities and decision-making arrangements
- ☐ Consider how you would operate during a temporary closure or disruption
- ☐ Review arrangements for excursions, camps, outdoor activities and events

Property and Infrastructure

- ☐ Check water supply arrangements and contingency options
- ☐ Identify and address heat risks in indoor spaces
- ☐ Check drains, gutters and stormwater systems
- ☐ Review fire risks around buildings and outdoor areas

Health and Wellbeing

- ☐ Ensure staff understand heat-related illness and dehydration risks
- ☐ Review procedures for poor air quality and smoke events
- ☐ Identify children, students and staff who may require additional support during extreme weather
- ☐ Consider wellbeing impacts from ongoing or repeated disruptions

Communications

- ☐ Update family and staff contact information
- ☐ Review communication processes and channels
- ☐ Prepare messages for likely scenarios such as closures, water restrictions or severe weather
- ☐ Monitor forecasts, warnings and local authority advice throughout the season
- ☐ Have key emergency contacts already stored in your mobile phone, WhatsApp, other App - eg, local council, school transport providers, community providers, local schools and early learning services.

For further information including links to key information sources to support your planning and response, go to our more detailed guidance - [Preparing for El Niño](#)