



**Te Tāhuhu o  
te Mātauranga**  
Ministry of Education

# Preparing for El Niño

## Planning for Spring – Summer 2026



**New Zealand Government**  
Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa

# Contents

|                                                       |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction .....                                    | 3  |
| Possible impacts for education settings .....         | 3  |
| Preparing for operational disruption .....            | 4  |
| Who might be most impacted.....                       | 5  |
| Drought / Water supply .....                          | 6  |
| Fire danger.....                                      | 7  |
| Heat .....                                            | 8  |
| Wet weather and flooding .....                        | 9  |
| High winds .....                                      | 10 |
| Health.....                                           | 11 |
| Communications .....                                  | 13 |
| Connections and relationships .....                   | 14 |
| Planning for future climate and weather impacts ..... | 15 |
| Where to get information.....                         | 16 |

# Introduction

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, understand the risks relevant to your area, and take practical steps to help keep your children, students, staff and community safe.

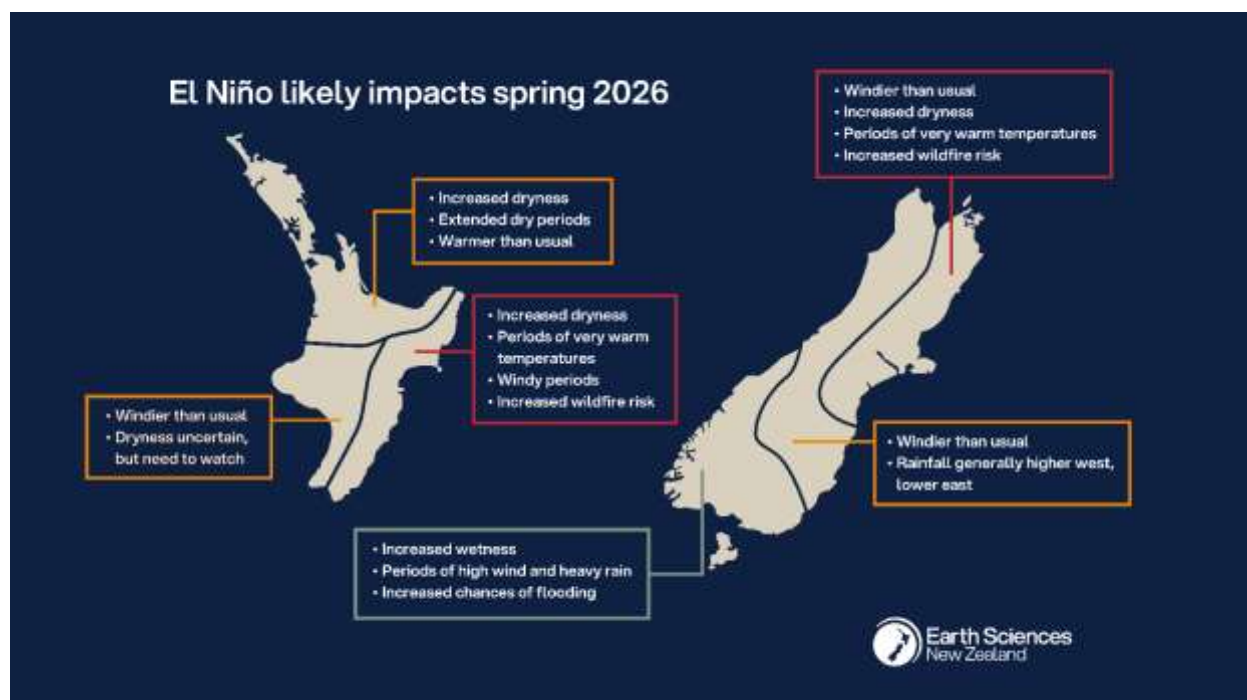
[El Niño declared, expected to intensify into one of the strongest on record | Earth Sciences New Zealand | NIWA](#)

## Possible impacts for education settings

As we move through spring and into summer, depending on your location, you may experience some of the following impacts:

- Greater likelihood of prolonged dry periods in many eastern and northern parts of New Zealand
- Increased fire danger
- More heat events and heat alerts
- Increased pressure on water supplies
- Strong wind events and occasional severe weather
- Potential health and wellbeing impacts on students, staff and whānau.

**Diagram: Earth Sciences NZ - likely Spring impacts**



# Preparing for operational disruption

## Possible impacts

- Temporary closure due to fire, smoke, flooding, power outages or water shortages
- Reduced use of outdoor learning, play, recreation spaces and sports facilities
- Disruption to transport routes
- Staff absences
- Increased demand for leadership, operational decision-making and communications.

## Readiness considerations

- How would you continue to operate if you had to close temporarily?
- What critical functions would need to continue during a disruption?
- What decisions would trigger cancellation of outdoor activities, events or excursions?
- Are responsibilities clear if key leaders are unavailable?
- Are family and emergency contact details current and accessible?
- Does your Transport Service Provider (and other key providers) hold your current emergency contact details?

## Outdoor activities and events

Consider how heat, air quality, fire restrictions, water shortages and severe weather may possibly affect planned activities and what alternative arrangements may be required:

- Outdoor learning and play programmes
- Sports and recreation activities
- Swimming and water-based activities
- Camps, excursions and Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) activities
- Community, cultural and whānau events.

# Who might be most impacted

Infants, young children and students may be more vulnerable to heat and dehydration because their bodies are less able to regulate temperature effectively:

- **Young children and infants** who are more vulnerable to heat and dehydration because their bodies are less able to regulate temperature effectively
- **Children, students and staff with existing health conditions**, particularly respiratory conditions (such as asthma), diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or conditions that affect how the body responds to heat
- **Children, students and staff with disabilities or complex health needs**, especially where those needs may affect mobility, communication, hydration, temperature regulation, or access to support
- **Children, students and staff experiencing mental health challenges**, as heat and prolonged weather-related disruption can affect wellbeing, sleep, stress levels and the ability to cope
- **Pregnant staff members**, who may be more susceptible to heat-related impacts
- **Children, students and staff spending extended periods outdoors**, including those participating in sports, outdoor education, playground supervision, grounds maintenance, or cultural activities
- **People who face communication barriers**, including those whose primary language is not English or who have disabilities that affect communication, as important health and safety messages may not always be easily understood or accessible
- **Members of education communities already affected by previous adverse events**, who may experience cumulative wellbeing impacts and increased stress when faced with further disruptions
- **Children, students, staff and whānau in rural communities**, particularly where drought, water shortages, reduced water quality, or impacts on livelihoods place additional pressures on households and communities.

# Drought / Water supply

## Impacts

Depending on your location and water supply arrangements, you may experience:

- Water restrictions imposed by your local authority
- Reduced availability of drinking water, particularly if you rely on rainwater collection systems or bore water
- Pressure on water used for toilets, hygiene and cleaning
- Dry grounds and playing fields.
- Reduced water quality if local water sources come under pressure
- Additional operational and maintenance challenges.

## Mitigations / Readiness

### ***Review your water supply arrangements***

- Understand where your water comes from and any vulnerabilities in your supply
- Identify alternative water sources if normal supplies become limited
- Consider how long your current supply could sustain essential operations.

### ***Check infrastructure***

- Inspect tanks, pumps, pipes and storage systems
- Are your water tanks clean?
- Fix leaks and address avoidable water loss
- Review irrigation systems and water use practices.

### ***Plan ahead***

- Review your business continuity and emergency plans
- Identify essential water needs for health, safety and sanitation
- Consider what measures you would take during water restrictions.

### ***Promote water conservation***

- Encourage responsible water use among children, students and staff
- Share information with your community about water-saving practices.

# Fire danger

## Impacts

El Niño conditions may increase the likelihood of elevated and prolonged fire danger. You may experience:

- Fire restrictions affecting outdoor activities and programmes
- Increased wildfire risk in surrounding areas
- Smoke affecting outdoor activities and air quality
- Potential evacuation or temporary closure
- Disruptions to transport, utilities and community services.

## Mitigations / Readiness

### ***Reduce fire risk around your site***

- Clear vegetation and debris near buildings
- Manage long grass and other combustible materials
- Maintain clear emergency access routes.

### ***Review emergency procedures***

- Ensure evacuation and reunification procedures are current
- Confirm responsibilities for decision-making during fire events
- Identify alternative locations if relocation becomes necessary
- Contact your local Fire and Emergency New Zealand station / contact to seek advice if you are unsure on evacuation procedures and locations in an emergency.

### ***Monitor local conditions***

- Stay informed about local fire danger ratings and restrictions
- Understand the wildfire risks specific to your area.

### ***Prepare for smoke impacts***

- Consider when outdoor activities may need to be modified or cancelled
- Identify indoor spaces that can be used during smoky conditions.

# Heat

## Impacts

You may experience repeated periods of unusually warm weather and heat alerts.

Potential impacts include:

- Uncomfortably hot classrooms and learning environments
- Reduced concentration, learning performance and engagement
- Fatigue and discomfort among students and staff
- Increased risk of dehydration
- Heat-related illness
- Changes to outdoor learning, play, recreation and other activities.

## Mitigations / Readiness

### ***Assess your buildings and learning spaces***

- Identify spaces that are most vulnerable to heat
- Improve ventilation where possible
- Use blinds, shade and sun protection measures
- Check fans and cooling systems before summer.

### ***Review operational arrangements***

- Consider flexible approaches to outdoor activities during extreme heat
- Schedule strenuous activities outside the hottest parts of the day where possible
- Encourage regular hydration breaks.

### ***Support children, students and staff***

- Promote sun-safe behaviours
- Encourage students and staff to drink water regularly
- Ensure staff understand the signs of heat stress and heat-related illness.

### ***Monitor conditions***

- Keep track of forecasts and heat alerts
- Consider additional support for students and staff who may be more vulnerable to heat.

# Wet weather and flooding

## Impacts

Although many parts of New Zealand may experience drier conditions overall, El Niño can still bring severe weather events.

You may experience:

- Heavy rainfall events
- Localised flooding
- Surface flooding around your site
- Damage to buildings and grounds
- Travel disruptions
- Power outages
- Strong winds accompanying weather systems.

## Mitigations / Readiness

### *Prepare your site*

- Check drains, gutters and stormwater systems
- Identify areas that are vulnerable to flooding
- Secure loose outdoor items.

### *Review emergency plans*

- Confirm procedures for sheltering in place, evacuating and early closure
- Ensure staff understand their roles and responsibilities.

### *Prepare for service disruptions*

- Consider how you will operate during power, communications or transport disruptions
- Review business continuity arrangements.

### *Monitor forecasts and warnings*

- Stay informed about weather watches, warnings and local advice
- Understand the flood risks in your local area.

# High winds

## Impacts

- Damage to buildings, roofing, shade structures and trees.
- Safety risks from falling branches and debris
- Power outages
- Transport disruptions affecting attendance
- Cancellation of outdoor activities.

## Mitigations / readiness

- Inspect trees and overhanging branches
- Secure outdoor furniture, equipment and shade structures
- Review procedures for high wind warnings
- Prepare for potential power outages.

# Health

## Impacts

### *Heat-related health impacts*

Heat can affect health before conditions reach formal heatwave levels. Infants, young children and some students may be particularly vulnerable to heat and dehydration.

Impacts may include:

- Dehydration
- Heat stroke
- Heat exhaustion
- Fatigue
- Reduced concentration
- Exacerbation of existing health conditions.

Consider the need for safe storage of medications and temperature-sensitive supplies during hot weather.

### *Smoke and air quality impacts*

Wildfire smoke can travel significant distances and affect communities well beyond the location of a fire. Smoke contains fine particles that can affect health, particularly for children and people with existing health conditions.

Impacts may include:

- Coughing and throat irritation
- Eye irritation
- Difficulty breathing
- Worsening asthma and respiratory conditions.

### *Wellbeing impacts*

Some members of your community may already be experiencing the effects of previous severe weather events. Repeated exposure to disruptive events can have cumulative wellbeing impacts.

Impacts may include:

- Increased stress and anxiety
- Reduced ability to cope with ongoing disruptions
- Additional pressure on children, students, staff and whānau.

## **Mitigations / Readiness**

### ***Review health response procedures***

- Ensure staff know how to recognise and respond to heat-related illness
- Check that first aid procedures and supplies are current.

### ***Plan for poor air quality***

- Monitor local air quality information where available
- Consider reducing outdoor activities when smoke levels are elevated
- Identify suitable indoor alternatives.

### ***Support wellbeing***

- Encourage regular wellbeing check-ins for children, students and staff, as appropriate.
- Recognise that people may respond differently to prolonged or repeated events
- Maintain access to existing wellbeing supports.

### ***Ensure communications are inclusive***

- Consider the needs of students, staff and families who require information in accessible formats
- Use clear language and multiple channels to support understanding.

# Communications

## Before an Event

You can improve your ability to respond by:

- Checking that emergency contact details are current
- Confirming how you will communicate with staff and families
- Preparing template messages for likely scenarios
- Identifying who is responsible for approving and sending communications.

## During an Event

Provide information about:

- What is happening
- What actions you are taking
- Any actions required from families
- Where further information can be obtained.

## After an Event

Continue communicating with your community by:

- Providing updates on your operations
- Sharing information about available supports
- Explaining recovery activities and next steps
- Confirming any changes to normal operations.

## Communication principles

- Use plain language
- Avoid technical terms where possible
- Recognise that people may be under stress
- Make information available in accessible formats where appropriate
- Ensure information reaches the widest possible audience.

# Connections and relationships

## Why relationships matter

Strong relationships can make a significant difference during and after an emergency.

Consider how well connected you are with the people and organisations that may be important during an emergency response or recovery.

## Readiness considerations

Relationships are often easier to establish before an emergency than during one:

- Check who your contact is at your local Civil Defence Emergency Management group
- Confirm what support your local council will be able to provide during an emergency
- Reaffirm your connections with your local emergency services
- Connect or reconnect with local marae, community organisations or other trusted community networks that may play a role in supporting whānau and communities during an emergency
- Do you have good connections with nearby early learning services, schools, kura or other education providers?
- Could you share information, resources, facilities or support if another education provider in your area was affected?
- Are there existing community networks that could help identify and support children, students, staff or whānau who may need additional assistance?

## Practical actions

- Maintain up-to-date contact details for key local agencies and community partners (review and update this section in your emergency management plan)
- Participate in local emergency preparedness initiatives where opportunities arise
- Build and maintain relationships with neighbouring education settings
- Ensure staff know who key local contacts are and where this information is kept
- Consider how your education setting can both receive and provide support within the wider community during an emergency
- Following an emergency, there will be an expectation you continue operating or return to normal operations as soon as practicable.

# Planning for future climate and weather impacts

As you plan for future maintenance, upgrades, lease arrangements or property investments, consider how your buildings, outdoor environments and infrastructure can be made more resilient to heat, drought, severe weather and other climate-related hazards.

You may wish to consider opportunities to:

- Improve ventilation and reduce overheating in indoor learning spaces
- Increase shade in outdoor areas
- Improve water efficiency and resilience of water supply systems
- Improve drainage and stormwater management
- Reduce risks from flooding, high winds and wildfire
- Improve the overall resilience and performance of buildings and outdoor environments.

Climate-related risks can affect education settings in different ways depending on their location, building design and infrastructure. Incorporating resilience considerations into long-term planning can help reduce disruption and support the safety and wellbeing of children, students, staff and whānau.

For schools, when developing your 10-Year Property Plan and 5YA projects, if you identify climate or weather-related property risks that may require future investment, discuss these with your property advisor as part of your planning process.

# Where to get information

## Other Agencies and Organisations

- National Emergency Management Agency information A3  
[National Readiness Forum 2026 - A3 Summary](#)
- NIWA - [Seasonal Climate Outlook | Earth Sciences New Zealand | NIWA](#)
- MetService forecasts, watches and warnings - [MetService - Te Ratonga Tiorangi](#)
- Fire danger information - [FireWeather](#)
- Check before you light a fire - [Fire prevention and fire safety | Fire and Emergency New Zealand](#)
- For support when reviewing your emergency management plans - [Find a station | Fire and Emergency New Zealand](#) –
- Water services regulator - [The Water Services Authority - Taumata Arowai | Home](#)
- Local council water restriction information - [Council websites - LGNZ](#)
- Health NZ guidance, including impacts on health - [El Niño](#)
- Regional Civil Defence Emergency Management information - [Local civil defence groups » National Emergency Management Agency](#)

## Ministry of Education resources and support

- [Prepare for an emergency or traumatic incident - Ministry of Education](#)
- [Water supply in schools - Ministry of Education](#)
- [Fire safety for fireworks, outdoor fires and school sleepovers - Ministry of Education](#)
- [Ventilation for school buildings - Ministry of Education](#)
- [Procurement for emergencies and unforeseen events - Ministry of Education](#)
- [Checking your property after a major incident - Ministry of Education](#)
- [5 Year Agreement funding - Ministry of Education](#)

### **School leaders**

- Please contact your Ministry of Education regional office if you need support with readiness or response - [Regional offices - Ministry of Education](#)
- Emergency response coordinators are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to respond to property-related damage as the result of a disaster such as fire, flood and extreme weather - [Emergency response coordinator contacts - Ministry of Education](#)

- For any general queries, advice or support around managing your water services, including your drinking water supply, contact us using the following email address: [water.services@education.govt.nz](mailto:water.services@education.govt.nz)

### ***Early learning leaders***

- Please contact the Education Review Office if you need support - [ERO - Contact Us](#)
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*See also our [Quick Guide: Preparing for El Niño](#) for a checklist to support your readiness*



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kia rangatira ai, kia mana taurite ai ōna huanga.

We shape an education system that delivers  
equitable and excellent outcomes.

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