

Weather

Where's the snow

La Nina causing weird weather: meteorologists

NEW YORK, Dec 5, (AP) - America's winter wonderland is starting out this season as anything but traditional.

The calendar says December but for much of the country temperatures beckon for sandals. Umbrellas, if not arks, are needed in the Pacific Northwest, while in the Rockies snow shovels are gathering cobwebs.

Meteorologists attribute the latest batch of record-shattering weather extremes to a stuck jet stream and the effects of a La Nina weather pattern from cooling waters in the equatorial Pacific.

It's still fall astronomically, but winter starts Dec. 1 for meteorologists. This year, no one told the weather that.

On Thursday, 65 weather stations across the nation set record high temperature marks for Dec. 2, including Springfield, Missouri, hitting 75 degrees Fahrenheit (24 Celsius) and Roanoke, Virginia 72 degrees Fahrenheit (22 Celsius). Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Billings, Montana, broke long-time heat records by 6 degrees.

Parts of Canada and Montana have seen their highest December records in recorded history. On Friday, parts of South Carolina and Georgia hit record highs.

In Washington state, Seattle, Bellingham and Quillayute all set 90-day fall records for rainfall. Bellingham was doused by nearly two feet (60 centimeters) of rain. The Olympic and Cascade mountains got hit harder, with more than 50 inches (127 centimeters) in three months, according to the National Weather Service. Forks, Washington, received more rain in 90 days than Las Vegas gets in 13 years.

On top of that, there is a blizzard warning on Hawaii's Big Island summits with up to 12 inches (30.5 centimeters) of snow expected and wind gusts of more than 100 miles per hour (161 kilometers per hour).

Meantime, snow's gone missing in Colorado. Before this year, the latest first measurable snowfall on record in Denver was Nov. 21, way back in 1934. There's a slight possibility of snow Monday night, according to the weather service. Yet, with no snow since April 22, this is the third longest stretch the city has gone without it.

Pressure

One big factor: The jet stream - the river of air that moves weather from west to east on a rollercoaster-like path - has just been stuck. That means low pressure on one part of the stream is bringing rain to the Pacific Northwest, while high pressure hovering over about two-thirds of the nation produces dry and warmer weather, said Brian Hurley, a senior meteorologist at the weather service's Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

If the jet stream moves more or bends differently, rain and other extreme weather won't be as concentrated, Hurley said.

This is a typical weather pattern with a natural La Nina weather oscillation, he said. The flip side of El Nino, a La Nina is a cooling of parts of the central Pacific Ocean that changes weather patterns across the globe. La Ninas tend to bring more rain to the Pacific Northwest and make the South drier and warmer.

These bouts of extreme weather happen more frequently as the world warms, said meteorologist Jeff Masters, founder of Weather Underground who now works at Yale Climate Connections. But scientists haven't done the required study to attribute these events to human-caused climate change.

In Boulder, Colorado, meteorologist Bob Henson enjoyed a rare December bike ride on Thursday.

Still, "there's a lot of angst about the lack of snow," he said. "It puts you in a psychic quandary. You enjoy the warm weather while keeping in mind it's not good for Earth to be warming."

Denver's winter has started with a whimper, and the parched mountains to the west aren't faring much better.

The Mile High City has already shattered its 87-year-old record for the latest measurable snowfall set on Nov. 21, 1934, and it's a little more than a week away from breaking an 1887 record of 235 consecutive days without snow.

The scenario is playing out across much of the Rocky Mountains, as far north as Montana and in the broader Western United States, which is experiencing a megadrought that studies link to human-caused climate change. It's only the second time since 1976 that Salt Lake City has gone snowless through November, and amid the unseasonably warm weather in Montana, a late-season wildfire fueled by strong winds ripped through a tiny central Montana farming town this week.

The warm and dry weather has drawn crowds to restaurant and bar patios in Denver, and the city's parks and trails have been bustling with people basking in the sunshine in shorts, short sleeves and occasionally flip flops.

Drought

As enjoyable as the weather is, climate scientists and meteorologists are warning that prolonged drought could threaten the region's water supply and agriculture industry. It also could hurt tourism, which relies heavily on skiers, snowboarders, rafters and anglers.

"Every day that goes by that we don't see precipitation show up and we see this year-to-year persistence of drought conditions, it just adds to a deficit. And we continue to add to this deficit year after year, particularly in the Colorado River Basin," said Keith Musselman, a hydrologist at the University of Colorado-Boulder.

Derek Greenough moved to Denver a few months ago and immediately bought a snowboard with the hope of soon hitting the slopes. But on Wednesday, he was enjoying the warm weather in a city park.

"I'm from central New York so I expected it to be somewhat like there, which they have about 5 feet of snow right now," said Greenough, 27, who was wearing a tank top and exercise shorts. "Today I figured that on the first day of December it would be snowing, at least something, but here we are. It's a nice day. ... I don't think I'll be snowboarding anytime soon."

Denver's high Wednesday hit 73 degrees Fahrenheit (23 degrees Celsius), tying the record set in 1973. The National Weather Service is predicting similar conditions over the weekend with only a slight chance of snow at the beginning of next week.

Frank Cooper, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Boulder, Colorado, said a La Nina weather pattern is pushing storm tracks farther north into the Pacific Northwest and Canada, allowing highs in the Denver area to reach into the 70s.

"Basically, we haven't had any systems really able to get into the area to cool us off," he said, noting that the average high in Denver this time of year is 45 degrees Fahrenheit (7 degrees Celsius).

Musselman likens mountain snowpack to a natural reservoir that holds moisture during the winter months and releases it in the spring and summer when demand from trees, plants, animals and humans is greater.

"That natural reservoir is being affected by climate change, and warming is reducing the amount of snow that's occurring in the mountains," he said.

repeat offense."

Oregon has only about 170 wolves within its borders, and the loss of eight "is so egregious," Kamal said.

"The poisoning of the Catherine wolf pack is tragic and disgusting," said Sophia Ressler, a staff attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. "No wolf should have to suffer such a fate. Awful events like this show how much more work is needed for us to coexist with these vitally important animals." (AP)



Pharmacist Todd Gharibian, (right), administers a dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to Toshiko Sugiyama, (left), at a CVS Pharmacy branch on March 1, 2021, in Los Angeles. A rush of vaccine-seeking customers and staff shortages are squeezing drugstores around the country. That has led to frazzled workers and even temporary pharmacy closures. (AP)

Coronavirus

'There is a lot of stress and burnout'

US drugstores squeezed by virus

NEW YORK, Dec 5, (AP) - A rush of vaccine-seeking customers and staff shortages are squeezing drugstores around the US, leading to frazzled workers and temporary pharmacy closures.

Drugstores are normally busy this time of year with flu shots and other vaccines, but now pharmacists are doling out a growing number of COVID-19 shots and giving coronavirus tests.

The push for shots is expected to grow more intense as President Joe Biden urges vaccinated Americans to get booster shots to combat the emerging omicron variant. The White House said Thursday that more than two in three COVID-19 vaccinations are happening at local pharmacies.

And pharmacists worry another job might soon be added to their to-do list: If regulators approve antiviral pills from drugmakers Merck and Pfizer to treat COVID-19, pharmacists may be able to diagnose infections and then prescribe pills to customers.

"There's crazy increased demand on pharmacies right now," said Theresa Tolle, an independent pharmacist who has seen COVID-19 vaccine demand quadruple since the summer at her Sebastian, Florida, store.

Vaccines

Pharmacists say demand for COVID-19 vaccines started picking up over the summer as the delta variant spread rapidly. Booster shots and the expansion of vaccine eligibility to include children have since stoked it.

On top of that workload and routine prescriptions, many drugstores also have been asking pharmacists to counsel patients more generally on their health or about chronic conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure.

Pharmacies also have been handling more phone calls from customers with questions about vaccines or COVID-19 tests, noted Justin Wilson, who owns three independent pharmacies in Oklahoma.

"We're all working a lot harder than we did before, but we're doing everything we can to take care of people," Wilson said, adding that he has not had to temporarily close any of his pharmacies or limit hours so far.

Tolle said she was lucky to hire a pharmacy resident just before the delta surge arrived. The new employee was supposed to focus mostly on diabetes programs but has largely been relegated to vaccine duty.

Tolle said her Bay Street Pharmacy is now giving about 80 COVID-19 vaccines a day, up from 20 before the delta wave.

"God's timing worked out well for me," she said. "We would not have gotten through without having that additional person here."

Others haven't been as fortunate. A CVS Health store on the north-east side of Indianapolis shuttered its pharmacy in the middle of the afternoon Thursday due to staffing issues. A sign taped to the metal gate over the closed pharmacy counter also told customers that the pharmacy will

the agency said in a press release.

"To my knowledge this is the first wolf pack to be killed by poison in Oregon," said Capt. Stephanie Bigman of the OSP in Salem. "To my knowledge there are no suspects. All investigative leads have been exhausted and that is why we are reaching out to the public for assistance."

Wolf advocates were stunned by the news. "This is horrific," said Sristi Kamal of Defenders of Wildlife in Portland. "This is quite clearly an intentional and

Coronavirus death toll 'so bitter because it is avoidable': Merkel

BERLIN, Dec 5, (AP) - Outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel on Saturday made what is likely her final appeal before leaving office next week for Germans to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Merkel gave what is expected to be her last weekly video message two days after federal and state leaders decided on a series of measures meant to break a wave of coronavirus infections.

The measures include excluding unvaccinated people across the country from nonessential stores, restaurants and sports and cultural venues. In a longer-term move, parliament will consider a general vaccine mandate.

At least 68.9% of Germans are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, short of the government's aim of a minimum 75% vaccination rate. The number of unvaccinated residents has been blamed as a key factor in a surge of new virus cases in recent weeks.

Official figures suggest that the infection rate may now be stabilizing, but at too high a level.

The national disease control center on Saturday reported 64,510 new daily cases and a 7-day infection rate of 442.7 new cases per 100,000 residents. Another 378 deaths in 24 hours brought Germany's total in the pandemic to 102,946.

"Every one of them leaves behind families or friends, stunned, speechless and helpless," Merkel

said in her video message. "This is so bitter because it is avoidable. With the effective and safe vaccines, we have the key to this in our hands."

She renewed a plea to Germans to take the virus seriously, adding that the new omicron variant "appears to be even more contagious than the previous ones."

"Get vaccinated, no matter whether it's a first vaccination or a booster," Merkel said. "Every vaccination helps."

Germany's incoming transport minister is advising people against traveling over Christmas as the country tries to stem a wave of coronavirus infections.

Federal and state leaders on Thursday announced tough new restrictions that largely target unvaccinated people, preventing them from entering nonessential stores, restaurants, sports and cultural venues. In a longer-term move, parliament will consider a general vaccine mandate.

Volker Wissing, whose pro-business party has designated him as transport minister in the incoming government, told Sunday's edition of the Bild am Sonntag newspaper that "in the current situation, it seems more sensible to spend Christmas in a small group at home and not to plan big trips across the country."

"Winter 2021 will be more dramatic than winter 2020," he added.

soon start closing for a half hour each afternoon so the pharmacist can have a lunch break.

Such temporary closures have ebbed and flowed in pockets around the country throughout the pandemic, but they have grown more acute in recent months, said Anne Burns, a vice president with the American Pharmacists Association.

Pharmacies all need minimum staffing to operate safely, and they sometimes have to close temporarily if they fall below those levels.

Pandemic

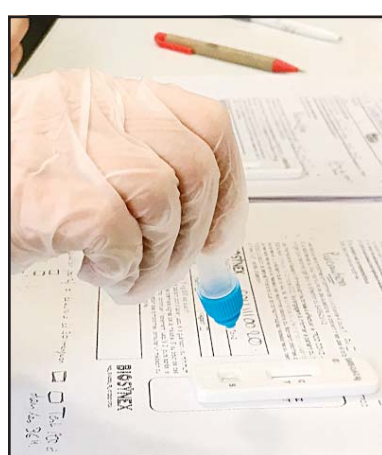
Burns said many pharmacies already had relatively thin staffing levels heading into the pandemic, and a wave of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians left after the virus hit.

"There is a lot of stress and burnout for individuals who have been going at this since March of 2020," she said.

CVS Health spokesman T.J. Crawford said he couldn't comment on the circumstances for one store. But he said his company continues "to manage through a workforce shortage that isn't unique to CVS Health."

Rival drugstore chain Walgreens also has adjusted pharmacy hours "in a limited number of stores," spokesman Fraser Engerman said.

Both companies are hiring. CVS



A pharmacist displays a fast result COVID-19 tester at a pharmacy in Saint Pee sur Nilville, Saturday, Dec. 4. World Health Organization officials say that the measures used to counter the delta variant should remain the foundation for fighting the coronavirus pandemic, even in the face of the new omicron mutation of the virus. (AP)

Discovery

'Deeper emission reductions': Australia would set a more ambitious target of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by the end of the decade if the government changes hands in elections early next year, the opposition leader said on Friday.

Center-left Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese set climate policy as a battle line at elections expected to be held between March and May.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison was widely criticized at a UN climate summit in Scotland last month over his conservative government's target of reducing Australia's emissions by only 26% to 28% below 2005 levels by 2030.

It was the same target Australia adopted at the Paris summit in 2015, while other wealthy countries have pledged far deeper cuts in a bid to contain global warming to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Albanese said a change of government would mean Australia would be able to attend the next international climate and "not be in the naughty corner."

Australia's economy was similar to Canada's and Labor's goal was similar to the Canadian target of reducing emissions by 40% to 45% by the end of the decade.

"We think that we've got absolutely the balance right because one of the things that I wanted to make sure is that we have a policy that doesn't leave people behind, that supports industry, that supports jobs," Albanese said. (AP)

Deal to cut bison herd OK'd: Officials have agreed to allow as many as 900 bison from Yellowstone National Park to be shot by hunters, sent to slaughter or placed in quarantine this winter in a program that seeks to prevent the animals from spreading a disease to cattle.

An additional 200 bison among the park's more than 5,000 bison could be captured or hunted in the late winter if those numbers are met, federal, tribal and state officials agreed in a meeting Wednesday.

Bison routinely leave Yellowstone and head north into Montana each winter, raising concerns that the animals could spread brucellosis to cattle. Brucellosis is a bacterial disease that can cause cows to abort their calves. The disease can spread to people but is rare in humans in the US.

Elk have spread the disease to livestock but there are no documented cases of bison spreading brucellosis to livestock in the wild, the Bozeman Daily Chronicle reported.

Yellowstone currently has around 5,450 bison, on the high end of recent counts, according to park biologist Chris Geremia.

Removing 600 to 900 bison this winter should cause the population to stabilize or decline slightly but increase back to around current numbers after spring calving, according to park officials. (AP)

'Find killer of 8 wolves': Officials in Oregon are asking for public assistance to locate the person or persons responsible for poisoning eight wolves in the eastern part of the state earlier this year.

The Oregon State Police has been investigating the killing of all five members of the Catherine Pack in Union County, plus three other wolves from other packs,



Geremia



Morrison