

# What Is El Niño?

Have you ever heard a news headline mentioning that unusual or extreme weather is expected due to El Niño? It's something that we hear about every few years or so in North America.

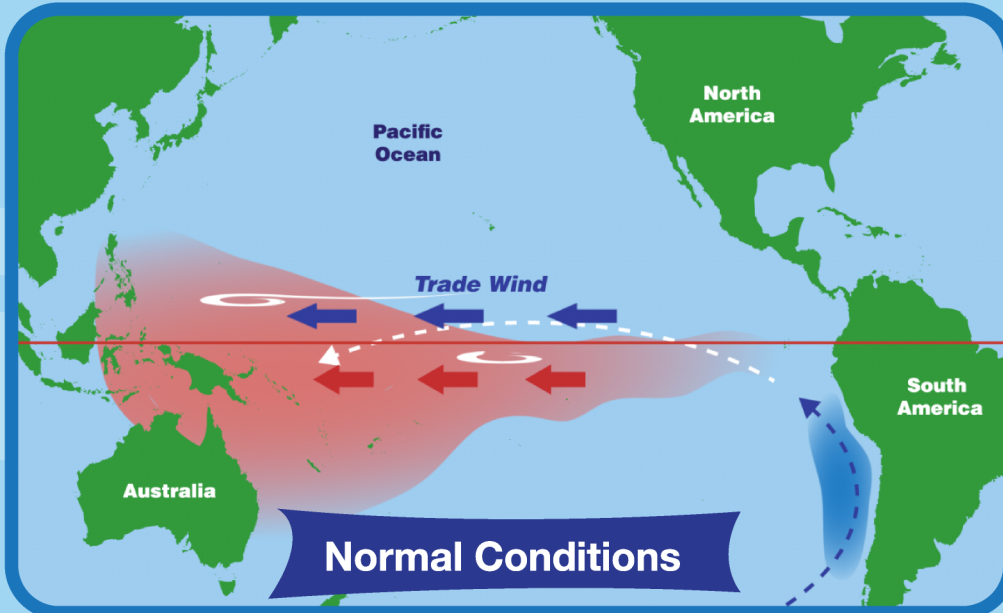
**BREAKING NEWS**

Is El Niño going to send rain our way? Watch at 6!

But what exactly is El Niño? And what does it have to do with our weather?



El Niño is a powerful weather pattern that occurs in the Pacific Ocean, but it can affect weather around the world.

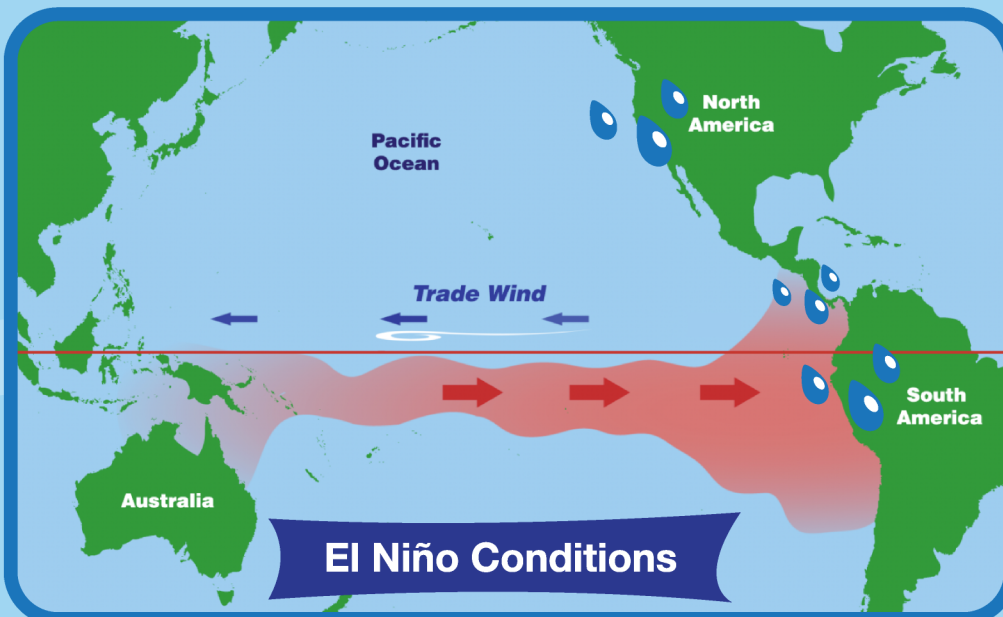


Under normal conditions, strong winds along the equator push warm water at the surface of the ocean from South America west toward Indonesia.

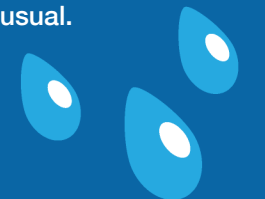


But, in an El Niño year, things are different. In fall and winter of an El Niño year, the winds at the equator grow much weaker than usual.

This causes warm water to shift back toward the coast of South America. When that happens, it can really shake things up!



That's because El Niño doesn't just stay in the ocean—it changes the weather, too. Because of El Niño, some places in the United States and Central and South America get way more rain than usual.



Very heavy rains and storms can sometimes lead to flooding in these regions.



At the same time, other places can get less rain than usual and experience droughts.

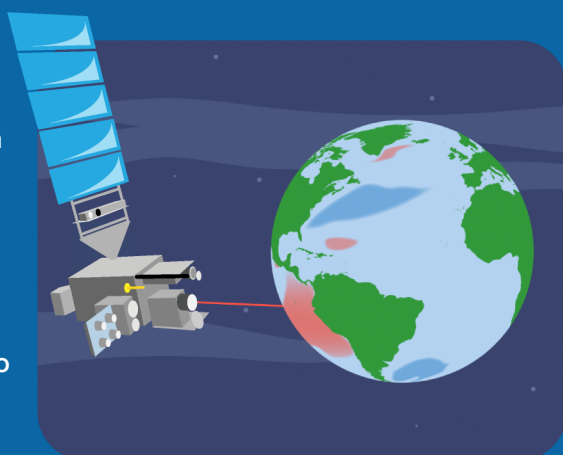


Wildlife can be affected by El Niño, too. For example, fish that usually live in cooler waters might swim away to new areas because of the warmer ocean temperatures.

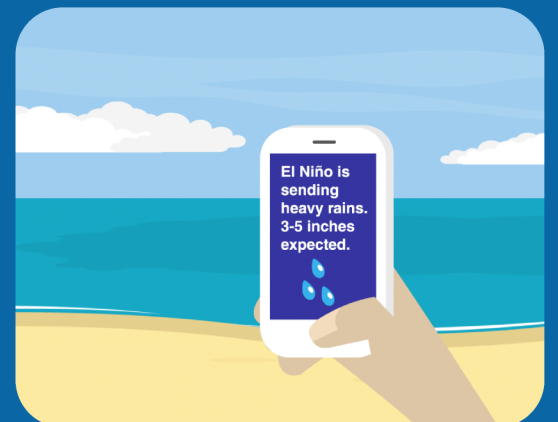


So, how do scientists know when El Niño is happening? They use satellites to keep an eye on the ocean's temperature from space!

Weather satellites, such as those in NOAA's GOES-R series, can use instruments to collect information about sea surface temperature.



Meteorologists can use this information to help predict if an El Niño pattern is forming. This advanced notice can help to help people in affected areas prepare for its effects.



Find out more about El Niño at [scijinks.gov/el-nino/](http://scijinks.gov/el-nino/)

