The 2026–2027 Super El Niño

What the ongoing event is, how strong it has become, and what it means for weather worldwide this fall and winter. Compiled September 6, 2026.

Current Status

NOAA's Climate Prediction Center upgraded its outlook from an El Niño Watch to an El Niño Advisory in June 2026 after conditions shifted from forecast to observed. Since then the event has intensified rapidly, and forecasters now describe it as one of the strongest on record.

Metric	Value
Alert level	El Niño Advisory (NOAA CPC)
Niño 3.4 anomaly (Jul 2026)	+2.03°C
Seasonal mean (May–Jul 2026)	+1.51°C
Chance of “very strong” event, fall/winter 2026-27	Greater than 90%
Chance El Niño persists through winter 2026-27	~100% through Jan–Mar 2027
Chance of historic intensity (exceeding all events since 1950)	61% for Oct–Dec 2026

Sources: IRI/Columbia Climate School ENSO Quick Look (Aug 2026); NOAA CPC ENSO Diagnostic Discussion (Jun–Aug 2026); StormBag/NOAA forecast summary (Aug 2026).

What Makes It a “Super” El Niño

El Niño is the warm phase of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO): sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific rise above average, weakening or reversing the normal easterly trade winds and shifting rainfall away from Indonesia and toward the central and eastern Pacific. A “Super El Niño” is the informal label used once those ocean temperature anomalies climb above roughly 2°C, a threshold reached only a handful of times since reliable records began.

Model ensembles tracked by IRI/Columbia now put the event's peak, expected around October–December 2026, into genuinely uncharted territory: most models forecast the Niño 3.4 anomaly will exceed +2.0°C, and roughly half project it could reach or pass +3.0°C, beyond the standard intensity scale used for classification.

Only five Super El Niño events have been recorded historically, occurring roughly every 10 to 15 years; the strongest on record remains the 1877–78 event, whose associated global droughts and famines killed tens of millions of people. The two most-cited modern reference points are 1997–98 and 2015–16, both linked to major flooding in California and significant global crop disruption.

How the 2026 Event Developed

Date	Development
Mar 2026	Six-year Southern Plains/Southwest U.S. drought persists; an emerging El Niño is floated as possible (but uncertain) relief.
Jun 11, 2026	NOAA CPC declares El Niño has developed; Watch is upgraded to Advisory.
Jun 2, 2026	WMO urges global preparedness as conditions strengthen; UN Secretary-General warns of amplified impacts on a warming planet.
Aug 3, 2026	WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update projects seasonal SST anomalies could exceed 2.9°C, alongside a positive Indian Ocean Dipole that can compound drought and flood risk.
Aug 13-19, 2026	NOAA raises the odds of a “very strong” event past 90% and flags a 69% chance of historic, record-exceeding intensity for Oct-Dec 2026.
Early Sept 2026	Event continues intensifying; forecasters say it has already surpassed the 2015-16 event's pace and is closing in on that event's peak strength.

Expected Global Impacts, Fall/Winter 2026-27

Impacts vary widely by region and can't be predicted with certainty, but forecasters at NOAA, ECMWF, and the World Resources Institute point to broadly consistent regional patterns drawn from past strong events, amplified this year by an already-warm baseline climate.

Regions expecting drier/drought conditions:

- Caribbean, Central America, and northern Brazil
- Central and northern India, and much of Indonesia and the Philippines
- Central and southern Africa
- Australia, alongside the Northern Rockies and Ohio/Tennessee valleys in the U.S.

Regions expecting wetter/flood-prone conditions:

- Southern United States, especially California and the Southwest (more frequent, more intense atmospheric rivers)
- Parts of Peru and Ecuador, and eastern Africa
- Parts of the Middle East and Central Asia

In the U.S. specifically, NOAA expects the storm track to shift south, bringing wetter, stormier weather across the southern tier and a warmer-than-usual winter across the northern states, plus an elevated risk of high-tide coastal flooding, particularly on the West Coast. The eastern and central Pacific hurricane basins tend to be more active during El Niño, raising tropical storm risk for Hawaii, while the Atlantic hurricane season typically runs below normal.

Why This Event Could Hit Harder

- **A warmer baseline climate:** the last 11 years have been the warmest on record, so El Niño's added heat and moisture load onto an already-elevated baseline.
- **A positive Indian Ocean Dipole** is forecast alongside the El Niño, a combination that can amplify drought, flood, and wildfire risk around the Indian Ocean basin.
- **Existing drought deficits:** the U.S. Southern Plains and Southwest have been in drought for nearly six years; low reservoirs, streamflow, and aquifers mean one wet winter is unlikely to fully erase the deficit even if heavy rain arrives.
- **Record global temperatures likely:** climate scientists expect the combination of El Niño and long-term warming to significantly raise the odds of 2026-27 setting new global temperature records.

A note on uncertainty: El Niño strength does not translate mechanically into local impact severity — NOAA cautions that a stronger event does not guarantee stronger effects everywhere, and “every El Niño is not the same.” Peak ocean temperatures are still being revised upward as new data comes in, so specific numbers here may shift in NOAA's and WMO's monthly updates.

Sources: NOAA Climate Prediction Center (ENSO Diagnostic Discussions, Jun–Aug 2026); IRI/Columbia Climate School ENSO Quick Look (Aug 2026); World Meteorological Organization, “Strong El Niño expected to intensify” (Aug 2026); World Resources Institute, “2026 Super El Niño Impacts, Explained”; USDA Climate Hubs; Drought.gov; ABC News and Newsweek reporting (Aug 2026). Figures reflect forecasts and observations available as of early September 2026 and are subject to revision as the event evolves.