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# Forecasters: El Niño could deliver winter to Florida

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Here's some chilling news: Winter might actually reach South Florida this year.

Moderate El Niño conditions -- the same events that helped suppress hurricane activity this season -- are expected to propel waves of wintry weather to the region during the next few months, according to local forecasters.

That means a relatively wet dry season. Sweaters in the subtropics. Even the possibility of tornadoes.

"Due to the return of El Niño this fall, which should persist into next spring, South Florida's dry season may not be as dry as in previous years," said Robert Molleda, the National Weather Service's severe weather expert in South Florida. "More importantly, this may also mean that the threat of severe weather will likely be greater this winter and spring than in the past several years."

Molleda planned a news conference today to discuss the issue.

El Niños occur when water in the eastern Pacific becomes unusually warm.

During the summer and fall, El Niños can produce crosswinds that inhibit hurricane development. During the winter, El Niños can cause the jet stream to shift farther south, allowing northern cold fronts to dip into South Florida.

When those cold fronts arrive in Florida, they sometimes collide with warm, moist tropical air, creating severe weather.

That's what happened in 1998, when a ferocious storm struck the entire state in early February and then, three weeks later, a swarm of tornadoes pummeled the Orlando area, killing scores of people.

Three years ago, a moderate El Niño delivered relatively heavy rain that helped end a long drought in Florida.

No one can predict the precise effect of the current El Niño, but forecasters say history offers a lesson that should be remembered:

Even though hurricane season is nearly over, Floridians should keep an eye on the weather.

"There is a possibility that we may experience the most active winter and spring severe weather season since at least 2003," Molleda said.