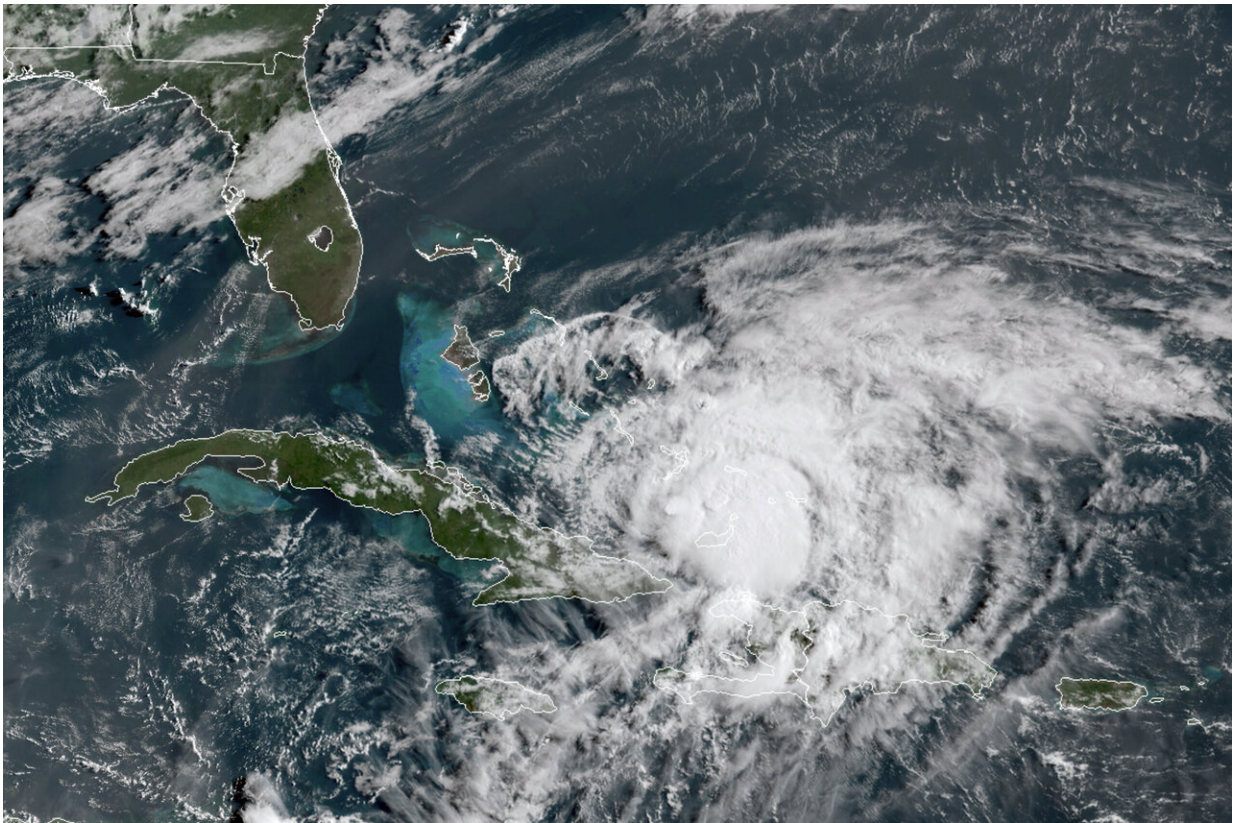


Bahamas, Florida brace as new Hurricane Isaias bears down

July 31 2020, by Dánica Coto and Adriana Gomez Licon



In this GOES-16 satellite image taken Friday, July 31, 2020, at 8:40 a.m. EDT., and provided by NOAA, Hurricane Isaias churns in the Caribbean. Hurricane Isaias kept on a path early Friday toward the U.S. East Coast as it approached the Bahamas, parts of which are still recovering from the devastation of last year's Hurricane Dorian. (NOAA via AP)

Forecasters declared a hurricane watch for parts of the Florida coastline on Friday as Hurricane Isaias drenched the Bahamas on a track for the U.S. East Coast.

Officials in Florida said they were closing beaches, marinas and parks in Miami-Dade County beginning Friday night. Mayor Carlos Gimenez said the county has 20 evacuation centers on standby that could be set up with COVID-19 safety measures.

"We still don't think there is a need to open shelters for this storm but they are ready," he said.

Isaias had maximum sustained winds of 75 mph (120 kph) Friday morning and it was expected to remain a hurricane for the next few days, according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami. It was centered about 295 miles (470 kilometers) southeast of Nassau in the Bahamas and was moving northwest at 16 mph (26 kph).

The Hurricane Center said heavy rains associated with the storm "may begin to affect South and east-Central Florida beginning late Friday night, and the eastern Carolinas by early next week, potentially resulting in isolated flash and urban flooding, especially in low-lying and poorly drained areas."

Gov. Ron DeSantis said "Florida is fully prepared for this and any future storm during this hurricane season," with stockpiles of personal protective equipment, generators, bottled water and meals ready to be distributed.



A moto-taxi driver moves through a street flooded by rain brought by the outer bands of Hurricane Isaias, in the Tabarre district of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, early Friday, July 31, 2020. Isaias kept on a path early Friday toward the U.S. East Coast as it approached the Bahamas. (AP Photo/Dieu Nalio Chery)

But he urged people to have seven days worth of food, water and medication ready and said that state-run coronavirus testing sites in the areas where the storm could hit will be closed.

"Our sites, because they're outdoors with tents, if it were to get 40-, 50-mile-per-hour winds, it would just collapse," he said. "Safety is paramount for that."

Mayor Gimenez said that social-distancing measures prompted by

COVID-19 mean each person in shelters needs to have 40 square feet and no more cafeteria-style dining will be allowed.

People who are infected with the new coronavirus and need to evacuate will be isolated in classrooms separate them from the general population, he said. "It's a challenge, but these are some of the things you have to think about in the age of COVID-19 and now a hurricane."

In Daytona Beach and Polk County, authorities began distributing sandbags and other officials advised people to prepare three days to a week of emergency provisions at home.



In this image made from video, cars drive through high water on a road in Canovanas, Puerto Rico, Thursday, July 30, 2020. Tropical Storm Isaias knocked out power and caused flooding and small landslides across Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic on Thursday as forecasters predicted it would strengthen

into a hurricane while moving toward the Bahamas and U.S. East Coast.(AP Photo)

A hurricane watch was in effect from north of Deerfield Beach northward to the Volusia-Brevard County Line.

On Thursday, while still a tropical storm, Isaias toppled trees, destroyed crops and caused widespread flooding and small landslides in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, where hundreds of thousands of people were left without power and water.

Officials reported that a man died in the Dominican Republic when he was electrocuted by a fallen electrical cable.

The Puerto Rico National Guard rescued at least 35 people from floodwaters, which swept away one woman who remains missing.

A hurricane warning was in effect for the northwestern Bahamas, including Andros Island, New Providence, Eleuthera, Abacos Islands, Berry Islands, Grand Bahamas Island, and Bimini.

Two of those islands, Abaco and Grand Bahama, were battered by Dorian, a Category 5 storm that hovered over the area for two days and killed at least 70 people, with more than 280 reported missing. People are still living in tents on both islands, and officials said crews were trying to remove leftover debris ahead of Isaias.



In this image made from video, people look at level of Canovanas river following heavy rain caused by the storm in Alto Trujillo, Puerto Rico, Thursday, July 30, 2020. Tropical Storm Isaias knocked out power and caused flooding and small landslides across Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic on Thursday as forecasters predicted it would strengthen into a hurricane while moving toward the Bahamas and U.S. East Coast.(AP Photo)

Prime Minister Hubert Minnis announced late Thursday that he was relaxing a coronavirus lockdown as a result of the impending storm, but said a 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew would be implemented starting Friday. He said supermarkets, pharmacies, gas stations and hardware stores would be allowed to be open as long as weather permitted.

Stephen Russell, director of the Bahamas' Emergency Management Agency, said there were no plans to evacuate people, but he urged those living in low-lying areas to seek shelter.

The Bahamas has reported more than 500 confirmed COVID-19 cases and at least 14 deaths. It recently barred travelers from the U.S. following a surge in cases after it reopened to international tourism.

Given the pandemic, the prime minister urged young people to stay safe from the approaching storm to respect social distancing measures.



In this image made from video, a large tree toppled by tropical storm winds is seen in Alto Trujillo, Puerto Rico, Thursday, July 30, 2020. Tropical Storm Isaias knocked out power and caused flooding and small landslides across Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic on Thursday as forecasters predicted it would strengthen into a hurricane while moving toward the Bahamas and U.S. East Coast.(AP Photo)



Pedestrians venture out into the rain brought by the outer bands of Hurricane Isaias in the Petionville district of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, early Friday, July 31, 2020. Isaias kept on a path early Friday toward the U.S. East Coast as it approached the Bahamas. (AP Photo/Dieu Nalio Chery)



A man walks in the rain brought by the outer bands of Hurricane Isaias in the Petionville district of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Friday, July 31, 2020. Isaias kept on a path early Friday toward the U.S. East Coast as it approached the Bahamas. (AP Photo/Dieu Nalio Chery)

"Please do not engage in hurricane or COVID(-19) parties," he said. "It can be devastating."

Isaias was expected to produce 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) of rain in the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

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