

# Thousands evacuated as Philippine volcano spews ash, rocks

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Filipinos take shelter in an elementary school as volcanic activity increases at nearby Mount Mayon.

Thousands of people living near a Philippine volcano have taken shelter in evacuation centers as officials warned Sunday of health risks from ash

and toxic gases spewing from the rumbling crater.

Seismology researchers said they had recorded at least one volcanic earthquake in the past 24 hours and red-hot rocks were falling from Mount Mayon in the central province of Albay.

More than 12,800 people have been moved to evacuation centers, the Philippine civil defense office said, most from farming villages at or near the foot of the volcano.

"We're away from our home, but it's still better here because it's too dangerous," mother-of-two Rachel Ramirez, 30, told AFP during her third day at a school near the town of Daraga that had been turned into an [emergency shelter](#).

Mayon, about 330 kilometers (205 miles) southeast of the capital Manila, is considered one of the most volatile of the country's 24 active volcanoes.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said rocks were falling from a disintegrating lava dome being pushed out of the crater by molten material below the earth.

The rocks were raining down on areas up to two kilometers away and [sulfur dioxide emissions](#) had tripled on Saturday, state volcanologists said.

"There is a concomitant health risk while being close to the eruption because of inhaling sulfur dioxide gas or the particulate matter of ashfalls," Health Secretary Teodoro Herbosa told a press briefing Sunday.

On Thursday a five-step alert system for the volcano had been raised

from two to three.

"With Albay in a state of calamity due to Mayon's activity, we remind people to follow the recommendations and evacuation instructions of your local governments," Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos said Saturday.

Earthquakes and [volcanic activity](#) are common in the Philippines due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire" where tectonic plates collide.

Five years ago, Mayon displaced tens of thousands of people after spewing millions of tons of ash, rocks and lava.

The country's most powerful eruption in recent decades was Mount Pinatubo in 1991 that killed more than 800 people.

That disaster produced an ash cloud that traveled thousands of kilometers.

Mayon lies in a region also hit by many of the roughly 20 typhoons or [tropical storms](#) to strike the Philippines each year.

The frequent weather disasters often kill people, ravage farms, and help to keep millions poor.

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