

Solar storm on Thursday expected to make northern lights visible in limited US states

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A solar storm forecast for Thursday is expected to give skygazers in some states along the U.S.-Canada border a faint glimpse of the northern lights which—at their peak—produce a colorful sky show when solar

wind hits the atmosphere.

Northern lights, also known as [aurora borealis](#), are most often seen in Alaska, Canada and Scandinavia, but an 11-year solar cycle that's expected to peak in 2024 has the potential to make the lights visible in places farther to the south. [Three months ago, the light displays were visible in Arizona](#), marking the third severe geomagnetic storm since the current [solar cycle](#) began in 2019.

The Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks has forecast auroral activity on Thursday, based on long-term outlook.

Auroral activity also has been forecast for Canada.

Those in small slices of the contiguous U.S.—including parts of Wisconsin, Michigan and Montana—could also get a peek. But for them, the aurora will probably be a "faint glow on the horizon" said Lt. Bryan Brasher, a project manager for NOAA's Space Weather Prediction Center.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Space Weather Prediction Center said people wanting to experience an aurora should get away from city lights and that the best viewing times are between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. local time.

Northern lights occur when a magnetic [solar wind](#) slams into the Earth's magnetic field and causes atoms in the [upper atmosphere](#) to glow. The lights appear suddenly and the intensity varies.

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