

'So hot you can't breathe': Extreme heat hits the Philippines

April 24 2024, by Cecil MORELLA



The heat index was expected to reach the 'danger' level of 42 degrees Celsius or higher in at least 30 cities and municipalities of the Philippines.

Extreme heat scorched the Philippines on Wednesday, forcing thousands of schools to suspend in-person classes and prompting warnings for

people to limit the amount of time spent outdoors.

The months of March, April and May are typically the hottest and driest in the archipelago nation, but conditions this year have been exacerbated by the El Niño weather phenomenon.

"It's so hot you can't breathe," said Erlin Tumaron, 60, who works at a seaside resort in Cavite province, south of Manila, where the heat index reached 47 degrees Celsius (117 degrees Fahrenheit) on Tuesday.

"It's surprising our pools are still empty. You would expect people to come and take a swim, but it seems they're reluctant to leave their homes because of the heat."

The heat index was expected to reach the "danger" level of 42C or higher in at least 30 cities and municipalities on Wednesday, the state weather forecaster said.

The heat index measures what a temperature feels like, taking into account humidity.

The Department of Education, which oversees more than 47,600 schools, said nearly 6,700 schools suspended in-person classes on Wednesday.

There was a 50 percent chance of the heat intensifying in the coming days, said Ana Solis, chief climatologist at the state weather forecaster.

"We need to limit the time we spend outdoors, drink plenty of water, bring umbrellas and hats when going outdoors," Solis told AFP.

Solis said El Niño was the reason for the "extreme heat" affecting swaths of the country.

Around half the country's provinces are officially in drought.

'It's really hot here'

The northern municipality of Aparri endured a heat index of 48C on Tuesday, the highest in the country, and was expected to hit 45C on Wednesday.

The actual maximum air temperature was 36.4C (97.5F) on Tuesday, with 35C forecast for Wednesday.

"It's really hot here," Eric Vista of the municipal disaster agency told AFP.

Vista said a shower of rain on Tuesday night offered some temporary relief but it was "back to being super hot" on Wednesday.

Sweltering temperatures in the capital Manila forced more than 400 schools to switch to remote learning. The heat index reached 45C on Tuesday and was expected to hit 44C on Wednesday.

Tuesday's actual high in the city was 37.1C.

In drought-stricken Occidental Mindoro province, government employee Mary Ann Gener said people working indoors where there was air conditioning were fine.

"But it's terrible for those outside," she said.

"You get a headache immediately after you go out. You really need to hydrate."

In Dagupan city, north of Manila, university employee Edz Alteros said

she and her colleagues no longer went out for lunch because of the heat.

The heat index there reached 47C on Tuesday.

"We get somebody to buy food and we eat inside the office," Alteros, 27, said.

"The air conditioning is set at 14-18C during the hottest part of the day, but we ease up at other times to prevent the aircon breaking down."

Global temperatures hit record highs last year, and the United Nation's weather and climate agency said Tuesday that Asia was warming at a particularly rapid pace.

The Philippines ranks among the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

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