

Japan Prepares for Possible Hit by Super Typhoon Hagibis

The center of the storm was in the Pacific Ocean, and could hit Tokyo this weekend.

By Karen Zraick / nytimes.com / Oct 9, 2019



The storm Hagibis over the Northern Mariana Islands on Tuesday. CreditCreditNASA

A super typhoon in the Pacific Ocean could hit Japan on Saturday, potentially causing grave damage in Tokyo, experts said.

The center of Super Typhoon Hagibis was roughly 950 miles south of Tokyo as of Thursday morning local time, according to Brandon Bukunt, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Tiyan, Guam.

The storm was moving about nine miles per hour to the north, and expected to pass along the east coast of Japan on Saturday evening, he said. The fastest sustained winds of the storm, as estimated by satellites, were 160 miles per hour, equivalent to a Category 5 hurricane; a storm with sustained winds of over 150 miles per hour is classified as a super typhoon.

The storm is expected to weaken, with winds at about 90 miles per hour, as it approaches Japan. Mr. Bukunt predicted heavy rain there starting late Friday or early Saturday. The storm, he said, is expected to undergo “an extra-tropical transition” in the following days and become a large storm in the Bering Sea.

“It will impact the West Coast of even the U.S. with large surf, and Hawaii as well,” he said.

NHK, Japan’s public broadcaster, reported that officials were urging residents to prepare for potentially severe weather, including dangerous storm surges.

The typhoon caused the cancellation of Rugby World Cup games in Japan between England and France and Italy and New Zealand, the first time games have been canceled at the tournament. The canceled games will be counted as scoreless draws, with each team earning two points in pool standings.

It was unclear if Sunday’s match between Japan and Scotland in Yokohama — to determine who gets into the quarterfinals — would be affected.

Jeff Masters, a meteorologist with the magazine Scientific American, said that if Hagibis proceeds as predicted, it could become one of the most damaging typhoons in Japanese history.

“If it hits Tokyo Bay like some of the current forecasts are saying, then it’s going to be a multibillion dollar disaster,” Dr. Masters said.

Japan Rail announced that it would likely suspend services on multiple lines in advance of the typhoon hitting Japan. Both Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways have said they will suspend flights from Friday to Sunday.

It has been a month since Typhoon Faxai hit Japan, and some homes in Chiba prefecture outside Tokyo are still without power and many homes damaged during that storm are still huddling under blue tarps.

Last year, Jebi, the worst typhoon in 25 years, killed 11 people, injured hundreds, and caused an estimated \$12.6 billion in damage. It prompted government evacuation orders for about 49,000 people, with many more advised to flee.



Typhoon Jebi's strong winds caused damage in Osaka, Japan, in September 2018.
Credit Jiji Press/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

An increasing number of strong storms and greater rainfall are generally linked to global warming. Dr. Masters said that scientists have found that typhoons in the Northwest Pacific are reaching their maximum intensities farther north than they used to, increasing the risk to Japan. In a recent review paper by 11 hurricane scientists, nine of them concluded that the evidence suggests that human-caused climate change contributed to the migration, he noted.

The term typhoon is used for storms that develop in the northwestern Pacific and usually threaten Asia. Hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones are actually all the same thing — low-pressure circular storm systems with winds over 74 miles an hour, that form over warm water but different terms are used around the world.