

[THEME MUSIC]

NINA MOINI: Our top story-- extreme heat is expected across much of central and southern Minnesota today, including the Twin Cities metro. Experts are urging people to limit time outdoors and drink plenty of water. But first, we do have some severe weather moving through the state. MPR News chief meteorologist Ben Cathey is here in the studio with me. Thanks for being here, Ben.

BEN CATHEY: Thanks for having me, Nina.

NINA MOINI: Tell us about some of the severe weather that seems to be moving through northern Minnesota.

BEN CATHEY: Yeah, we just got a new tornado warning just as you were introducing me. This is for Cass County. Very high winds there. Considerable damage threat. That goes until-- let me do the math-- just after 12:40.

Existing tornado warning, which is heading right for Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, moving through Poplar right now onto Cross Lakes. We commonly call this the Brainerd Lakes area. This is just to the north of Brainerd. But even if there's not a tornado-- and there would be no way to tell in real time here. We could have up to 100-mile-per-hour wind gusts.

NINA MOINI: Wow.

BEN CATHEY: And what we look for is what's come upstream. And this same storm came through South Dakota just like a bat out of hell this morning. I mean, 131-mile-per-hour gusts in Highmore, confirmed tornadoes.

And so this storm is not going to affect everybody, but it does go towards Duluth and Hibbing over the next two to two and a half hours. There'll be a few more storms this afternoon in northwestern Minnesota. So I wrote down some of the towns that could be impacted because--

NINA MOINI: Sure.

BEN CATHEY: --there's a lot of weather. So Moose Lake, McGregor, initially, and then behind this we actually could have some wake low winds, which are really strong. So we could have more power outages. But later this afternoon-- Red Lake Falls, Thief River Falls, out towards Fosston. And let's just say Middle River could have some damaging winds.

You might be wondering, what about the southern end of the state? From 8:00 until 1 o'clock in the morning, 8:00 PM to 1:00 AM, we'll have some storms moving through. A lot of this is going to stay just to the north of the Twin Cities, more so St. Cloud, Hibbing, Brainerd, Bemidji, and some damaging winds possible there.

That's only one of the stories. As you know, it's very hot and humid.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. What kind of heat are you seeing around the state today?

BEN CATHEY: Well, it's not just the heat. It's the humidity. We've broken a bunch of records so far today-- all time for the dew point across much of Minnesota. St. Paul had its highest June dew point ever.

And it pales in comparison to Osceola just to the north of Stillwater and Pipestone. The dew point there is 84. You say, well, that's not that bad for a temperature. But the dew point, that's unheard of for this part of the country. And it really, without hyperbole, makes it difficult for the body to cool itself down. So that is truly dangerous heat.

You might even see some fog out there. It's so hot and humid. As far as temperatures today, 94 to 95. I'm wearing glasses right now. So when I stepped outside, it was-- poof. Your glasses instantly fog up because of the contrast. It's going to be the hottest day of the week today with the dangerous heat and humidity. But it does stay really hot through the rest of the week too.

NINA MOINI: OK. I know we had some stormy weather leading up to this heat, too, on Sunday. How intense did those storms get?

BEN CATHEY: Yeah, big storm Sunday. I heard from some folks that their triathlons got delayed. And other folks that were out for Pride-- I know some of the folks at the MPR float were saying it was some wicked rain earlier in the day. Thankfully not a ton of damage.

That system that folks messaged me about-- they said it looked like a hurricane on the radar that weekend as it came in from western parts of Minnesota. But some big rains. Thankfully, some of that rain, though, will help the drought in southwestern parts of the state.

NINA MOINI: That's good to know. So when will we cool off?

BEN CATHEY: Short answer is no time soon, unfortunately. We are going to just stay wickedly hot and very humid. Highs over the next couple of days-- I mentioned 94 to 95 today. It'll be 91 tomorrow, but feeling like 100, 86 to 87 on Wednesday, with much more likely rain through the morning. Feeling like the middle 90s after that round of rain. It's like a hot shower.

And then Thursday, close to 90, feeling quite a bit hotter. And the trend does stay hotter than normal for Minnesota standards all the way past the 10-day forecast. So no big cooldowns. It's a complete pattern shift for where we were. It was below average much of last week.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. So that's what's going on with the heat. What about storm chances for later this week?

BEN CATHEY: Yeah. Let's rehit the storms this afternoon. So moving towards Duluth and Hibbing right now in about two to two and a half hours. Then in the northwestern corner of the state through 4:00 PM and then 8:00 PM to 1:00 Am-- that's a lot of numbers. But just be prepared for storms later tonight, just to the north of the Twin Cities.

Tomorrow's a lot quieter, a lot more sunny, just plain hot and humid. And then Wednesday, widespread morning thunderstorms coming from south to north that will affect the Twin Cities and the surrounding metro area. And then as we head later into the week, it does look to be a little bit quieter. But when it's so hot, so humid in this heat dome pattern, we can't rule out a few more thunderstorms, and some could be severe.

NINA MOINI: All right, Ben Cathey, thanks for tracking this for us. Really appreciate it.

BEN CATHEY: Thank you, Nina.

NINA MOINI: That's MPR News Chief Meteorologist Ben Cathey. And while a lot of serious stuff is going on with the weather today and it's good to pay attention and all that, a lot of people are going to have fun today. And some of the places folks might go on a hot summer day is a water park. Pretty high on the list for some families.

The Faribault Family Aquatic Center is expecting the temperature to feel like it's more than 100 degrees and is planning for big crowds this afternoon. So here to talk about the day at the water park is the City of Faribault's recreation superintendent Kevin O'Brien. Thanks for being with us, Kevin.

KEVIN O'BRIEN: You're welcome. My pleasure. Thanks for having me on.

NINA MOINI: I found myself thinking, is today like your Super Bowl out at the water park? I don't know if you see typically-- on super hot days, do you see a lot more people? Or do you almost see not as many people coming out?

KEVIN O'BRIEN: We've seen it go both ways in years past, where it's either gets really busy and it stays busy all day. But when the humidity is as high as it is, we've also had times where we feel like more people stay at home, stay in the AC, than come to the pool.

NINA MOINI: Sure. It is quite humid. And so how do you prepare for a super hot day like this in terms of keeping the people who come and the families safe?

KEVIN O'BRIEN: Well, we are glad that it's not opening weekend for the season, just that the lifeguards have had a chance to get a feel for operations and how the pool gets busy and where people are and some of the nuances that come with that.

But as far as keeping staff safe, we shorten rotations so lifeguards are getting into the shade more often, getting a break, coming inside, making sure they stay hydrated and keep their water bottles full, making sure lifeguards and our guest service staff are at least getting their feet wet and in the water and cooling off a little bit there.

For patrons coming to use the pool, it's find one of the shade canopies and try to squeeze in and follow that shade throughout the course of the day.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. Yeah. Good tips. What kinds of features do you have there at your water park there in Faribault? What do people like to do?

KEVIN O'BRIEN: We've got a zero-depth-entry aquatic center that has activities and things for kids to do from toddlers all the way up to teenagers. We've got a toddler slide. We've got some spray features futures up in the shallow area of our zero-depth entry.

We've got a toddler water table. We've got a dump bucket. We've got lily pads. We've got two large flume slides that are body slides, not tubes. We've got a diving board, two climbing walls, a drop slide, water basketball, beanbags, gaga ball, and a sand play area.

NINA MOINI: Oh, my. OK, so you have room for all these people that are going to come out on a day like this. [LAUGHS]

KEVIN O'BRIEN: We do. Our capacity is 763 in water, which we haven't met for a number of years.

NINA MOINI: What are you seeing so far today? Do you feel like it's starting to fill up already? I mean, gosh, it's noon.

KEVIN O'BRIEN: Yep. I know my family is already over there. Yeah, it's going to be-- we had tot swim-- tot and sensory-friendly times starting at 11:00 and then general open swim started at noon. And yes, people are already starting to filter in.

NINA MOINI: OK. You know, Kevin, I know that if folks want to maybe avoid the crowds or it's not the time to take the whole family to the water park and make a whole day of it, there are other splash pads and things that Faribault has. Tell us a little bit about some of the fun and free, maybe, options?

KEVIN O'BRIEN: Mm-hmm. We just opened up this summer a new splash pad, our first splash pad here in town, at Viaduct Park. It is a more natural-scaped splash pad with spray features and limestone boulders around, kind of mimicking the river that's immediately adjacent the splash pad.

It really complements that outdoor play space look. And yeah, it is free to drop in. There's a light concession stand in the building immediately adjacent the splash pad. And there's lots of shade umbrellas around that space.

NINA MOINI: Cool. Thanks so much for checking in with us, Kevin. Wishing you all a fun and a safe day ahead. Thank you so much.

KEVIN O'BRIEN: You bet. Thank you.

NINA MOINI: That was Kevin O'Brien, recreation superintendent for the City of Faribault Parks and Recreation Department.