

Tropical Storm Idalia intensified overnight as it neared western Cuba and forecasters expect it to strengthen into “a dangerous major hurricane” by the time it reaches Florida’s Gulf Coast by early Wednesday. Florida’s governor, Ron DeSantis, said evacuation orders would likely be issued as the storm neared.

The storm is expected to strengthen slowly on Monday as it moves into the Gulf of Mexico, **but confidence is high among forecasters that rapid intensification will occur Tuesday, turning this storm into a category three hurricane with winds of 115 miles per hour or more.**

“This is going to be a major hurricane,” said Gov. DeSantis, warning everyone in the storm’s path to make preparations and listen to local directives and evacuation orders.

“Floridians, you need to be executing your plans now,” he said Monday morning. “Late Tuesday, early Wednesday, it’s going to start to get really nasty.”

Idalia’s exact landfall location in Florida will be difficult to predict, since the storm is expected to parallel the state’s west coast. Life-threatening storm surge and dangerous winds were likely for the west coast of Florida and the Panhandle as early as late Tuesday.

Gov. DeSantis said that evacuation orders would be issued along the Gulf Coast and for people to listen to their local officials. He also predicted school closures on Tuesday, Wednesday and maybe Thursday.

The governor urged people to heed any warnings from local officials, including evacuation orders, but said that people didn’t need to go very far or even leave the state. “It’s not necessary to outrun the storm,” Gov. DeSantis said. “Just get to higher ground.”

[Storm surge](#) watches were in effect for parts of Florida on Monday, as well as a hurricane watch extending from Englewood to Indian Pass, and including Tampa Bay. Hurricane watches were also in effect for Cuba. (A storm surge watch means there is a possibility of life- threatening inundation.)

A tropical storm watch was also issued from the Gulf Coast south of Englewood, which is about 80 miles south of Tampa, to Chokoloskee, a community roughly 65 miles south of Fort Myers, while a storm surge watch was in effect from Chokoloskee to Indian Pass.

Winds were predicted to reach a peak of 100 miles per hour, Jamie Rhome, deputy director of the National Hurricane Center, said in an [update on Sunday evening](#).

**“The hazards absolutely will extend beyond the cone,” he added, referring to the forecast maps showing the storm’s potential path. “Do not focus exclusively on the cone to determine your risk.”**