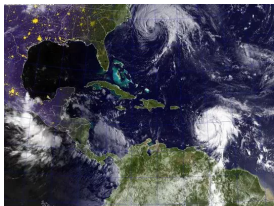


# Hurricane Maria causes 'widespread devastation' on Caribbean island of Dominica

John Bacon and Doyle Rice, USA TODAY Published 4:57 a.m. ET Sept. 19, 2017 | Updated 6:15 a.m. ET Sept. 19, 2017



(Photo: US NAVY HANDOUT, EPA-EFE)

Hurricane Maria devastated the Caribbean island of Dominica on Monday, as the nation's prime minister said his country has lost all that "money can buy and replace."

Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit said the initial reports were "of widespread devastation."

"My greatest fear for the morning is that we will wake to news of serious physical injury and possible deaths as a result of likely landslides triggered by persistent rains," he said in a Facebook post.

Maria grew to a Category 5 hurricane Monday night, with maximum sustained winds of 160 mph at 8 p.m. ET. It touched down in Dominica soon afterward, pounding the mountainous island with strong winds and tearing

roofs off houses.

Maria briefly weakened slightly to a still-dangerous Category 4 storm, before regaining Category 5 strength.

The National Hurricane Center said early Tuesday that top sustained winds had fallen slightly to 155 mph and that high winds were starting to diminish over Dominica.

The storm is moving west-northwest at 9 mph on a course that threatens islands already devastated by Hurricane Irma and could land a direct hit on Puerto Rico.

"The winds are merciless! We shall survive by the grace of God," Skerrit wrote at the start of a series of Facebook posts. "My roof is gone. I am at the complete mercy of the hurricane. House is flooding." He later said he was rescued.

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Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rossello said the government has prepared hundreds of shelters capable of housing more than 100,000 evacuees if necessary.

The National Weather Service in Puerto Rico warned that "catastrophic winds" are expected from Maria beginning Tuesday afternoon. "Locations may be uninhabitable for weeks or months."

In addition, "major to record rains and flooding are expected to accompany Maria," the weather service said.

It is still too early to determine whether the storm will impact the U.S. East Coast — and any threat would not be until early next week — but a strike on Florida is still a possibility.

"We may luck out and it turns north before reaching Florida," AccuWeather meteorologist Dave Samuhel said. "Unfortunately, it looks like low surface pressure could force it into Florida. Definitely something we are watching."

Due to the uncertain path of Hurricane Jose, it's "much too early to judge what portions of the U.S. East Coast might be threatened by Maria next week," according to Weather Underground meteorologist Jeff Masters.

"This storm promises to be catastrophic for our island," said Ernesto Morales of the National Weather Service in San Juan. "All of Puerto Rico will experience hurricane-force winds."

But first, the U.S. Virgin Islands likely will face "at least a glancing blow if not a full-on landfall" late Tuesday or early Wednesday, Samuhel said.

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**The Caribbean braces for Hurricane Maria**

Fullscreen

On St. John's, the smallest of the U.S. Virgin Islands, people lined up to flee the storm. Irma blasted across the island Sept. 7, a Category 5 storm with sustained winds of 185 mph. Homes and businesses were blown apart and power is expected to be out for months.

Haiti and the Dominican Republic could see Maria's wrath on Wednesday.

A potential impact on the East Coast will depend on steering currents in the upper atmosphere over the western Atlantic and the eastern U.S. that can't be determined more than a week in advance, according to the Weather Channel.

## Hurricane Jose threatens East Coast

Meanwhile, Hurricane Jose's 75 mph sustained winds will continue to bring rip currents and rough surf to the U.S. East Coast over the next several days.

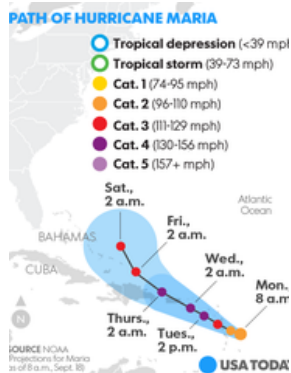
Tropical-storm warnings have been posted along the southeastern New England coast, including most of the Rhode Island and Massachusetts coastline.

"Coastlines from North Carolina to southern New England are in for a long period of rough surf and an increasing risk of beach erosion," Weather Underground meteorologist Bob Henson said. "If Jose were to make landfall, it could end up producing significant surge even as a post-tropical storm."

Jose will produce heavy rain as it passes near southern New England and the Mid-Atlantic on Tuesday and Wednesday, the hurricane center said. Total accumulations of 3 to 5 inches of rain are expected.

The hurricane center said the center of Jose was forecast to pass well offshore of the Outer Banks of North Carolina on Monday, east of the Delmarva peninsula overnight and Tuesday and east of the New Jersey coast on Wednesday.

*Contributing: Rick Jervis, Jane Onyanga-Omara, the Associated Press*



The projected path of Hurricane Maria. (Photo: USA TODAY)

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