

**From:** Giacinto, Joseph  
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# What is a hurricane?

A hurricane is a type of storm called a **tropical cyclone**, which forms over tropical or subtropical waters.

*VIDEO: What is a hurricane? Here's what you need to know in less than a minute. [Transcript](#)*

A tropical cyclone is a rotating low-pressure weather system that has organized thunderstorms but no fronts (a boundary separating two air masses of different densities). Tropical cyclones with maximum sustained surface winds of less than 39 miles per hour (mph) are called tropical depressions. Those with maximum sustained winds of 39 mph or higher are called tropical storms.

When a storm's maximum sustained winds reach 74 mph, it is called a hurricane. The [Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale](#) is a 1 to 5 rating, or category, based on a hurricane's maximum sustained winds. The higher the category, the greater the hurricane's potential for property damage.

Hurricanes originate in the Atlantic basin, which includes the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico, the eastern North Pacific Ocean, and, less frequently, the central North Pacific Ocean. A six-year rotating list of names, updated and maintained by the [World Meteorological Organization](#), is used to identify these storms.

"Hurricane Season" begins on June 1 and ends on November 30,

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