Millions in the Midwest under storm watches as Nebraska and Iowa communities reel from devastating tornadoes

Aya Elamroussi

CNN — normal

One day after destructive tornadoes plowed through Nebraska and Iowa, millions of people in parts of Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma were under tornado watches Saturday evening.

One tornado watch area includes the Kansas City metropolitan area and 2.7 million people in southeastern Kansas and western and central Missouri, according to the National Weather Service. The watch, which means severe thunderstorms and tornadoes are possible in and near the watch area, lasts until midnight CT.

Another tornado watch area covering much of Oklahoma and parts of North Texas was extended until 3 a.m. CT.

A third watch area was issued for eastern Iowa and parts of northeast Missouri, southwest Wisconsin and northwest Illinois, also effective until midnight CT.

And other was issued for eastern and central Missouri and central and western Illinois, including St. Louis, until 4 am CT.

In all, some 9 million people are under tornado watches in the late hours of

Saturday and early Sunday, stretching more than 800 miles from Texas to southern Wisconsin.

Here's the latest:

• A tornado touched down just east of Tinker Air Force Base in Norman, Oklahoma, at 9:49 p.m. CT, the National Weather Service reported. There were no immediate reports of damage.

• As of 8 p.m. CT, there were 11 tornado reports in Kansas and two in Missouri, the weather service's Storm Prediction Center said.

• Oklahoma's emergency operations center was activated Saturday, according to a Facebook post from Gov. Kevin Stitt. "Stay weather aware and know where you'll take shelter if a severe storm threatens your area," he told residents.

• Multiple tornado warnings were posted in Kansas, Oklahoma and north Texas Saturday afternoon, as storm cells popped up and moved across the region.

• A new tornado watch was issued by the Storm Prediction Center across eastern Iowa, northwest Illinois, northeast Missouri, and southwest Wisconsin, including Cedar Rapids and Davenport, Iowa. The watch covers 1.5 million people and lasts until 12 am CDT.

Storms expected through the weekend

The severe weather threat is expected to continue through Sunday, with strong tornadoes possible from Nebraska to Texas, including Dallas, Austin, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Kansas City and Wichita.

The national Weather Prediction Center warned of a rare "high risk for

excessive rain and flash flooding" event for a small area east of Oklahoma City. It warned of more than 3 to 6 inches of rain in the high-risk area, with the possibility of exceeding 1 to 2 inches an hour.

The warning included high confidence in a major flash flood event in parts of east-central Oklahoma, with higher end rainfall totals beginning late Saturday evening.

Nebraska, Iowa work to recover

In other states, residents are going through the damage left behind by some strong twisters.

The area of Elkhorn in Omaha, Nebraska, is one of the hardest-hit communities after severe storms barreled through parts of the Plains and South early Friday afternoon, authorities said. A powerful tornado leveled homes, which crews searched for anyone trapped or injured, local authorities said.

Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen told reporters Saturday it is a miracle there were no deaths.

After visiting impacted areas, the governor said viewing the damage was extraordinarily sobering, adding he met a few families who lost their homes after living in them for only a few months.

One of the tornadoes to hit Douglas County had a preliminary rating of EF-3 with winds topping 135 mph, according to Chris Franks with the National Weather Service. The other, which hit Omaha's airport, appeared to be an EF-2, he added.

Omaha's Eppley Airfield reopened for aircraft operations Saturday but delays

were expected, city officials said. The passenger terminal was not affected by the storm, but damage assessments at the airport were ongoing.

Two people in Omaha received medical treatment for minor injuries after a tornado swept through the Elkhorn area Friday. “We think injuries were so little because the warning systems in the City of Omaha and Douglas County were highly effective,” Omaha Police Chief Todd Schmaderer said. “We were not hit with a sudden storm. People had warned of this, which saved lives.”

Video shows violent tornado cross highway in Nebraska

00:44 - Source: CNN

Meanwhile in nearby Iowa, a large tornado was reported in the small city of Minden, according to the National Weather Service. Footage obtained by CNN shows the devastation of mangled structures and widespread debris.

Four people in Iowa’s Pottawattamie County suffered storm-related injuries and received medical treatment, county emergency management officials said in a news release early Saturday.

Roughly 120 homes and businesses were damaged in Pottawattamie County, where Minden is located and the home of about 90,000 residents. “Preliminary information indicates varying degrees of damage,” emergency officials said.

On the outskirts of Lincoln, Nebraska, a tornado tore the roofs off homes and crossed part of I-80 as it cut through. Multiple cars of a train derailed near Waverly after it was struck by a tornado, according to a railway spokesperson.

At least two tornadoes were observed in Texas on Friday afternoon. Video posted to social media showed an apparent twister churning across a large field northeast of Waco.

There were nearly 80 tornado reports Friday across at least five states, many of which have been confirmed by the weather service or through footage from storm chasers.

‘We’re thankful to be alive’

Jason Sunday, a resident of hard-hit Elkhorn in Omaha, described the tornado as a “freight train.” As it approached, he sought cover in his home, which he had just moved into 30 days ago, CNN affiliate KETV reported.

“We saw it coming from the southwest, and when it got too close for

comfort, we headed downstairs quickly. We were in the downstairs bathtub, and it was just like the movie said, it was like a freight train," Sunday told CNN affiliate KETV.

"And you knew the roof was coming off because that was a loud pop and sucking motion. It was pretty scary."

The tornado caused severe damage to the Sunday family's dream home.

"We're thankful to be alive. We're very thankful," Sunday added.

John Wells, a cleanup volunteer in the town of Blair just north of Omaha, says he saw sprawling storm damage Friday.

"There's propane tanks that are flipped. There's houses that they're not even on their foundation. You don't even know where they were," he told KETV. "I've never seen anything like this."

Sunday could still see storms

Damaging storms are also possible from Texas to Wisconsin Sunday. But the exact timing, extent and strength of these storms will depend heavily on Saturday night's storms.

Notably, areas from northeastern Texas to southern Iowa and western Illinois face the greatest chance for damaging storms that could bring strong wind gusts and large hail. An isolated tornado or two is also possible.

Heavy, flooding rainfall is possible, especially in parts of the Lower Mississippi Valley.

CNN's Ray Sanchez, Sara Smart, Mary Gilbert, Sharif Paget, Sarah Dewberry, Jamiel Lynch, Raja Rezek and CNN Meteorologists Sara Tonks, Brandon

Miller, Gene Norman and Robert Shackelford contributed to this report.