

Beware new fallen and drifted snow at high altitudes, and wet-snow avalanches as day unfolds

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Avalanche danger

Dry-snow avalanches

Both fresh fallen snow and freshly formed snowdrift accumulations from the last few days are still prone to triggering from place to place. The varying depths of these layers increase with ascending altitude. Avalanche prone locations for dry-snow avalanches are found primarily on very steep north-facing and east-facing slopes above approximately 2800 m. In isolated cases, avalanches can fracture and release in the uppermost layers of the snowpack. These avalanches tend to remain small-sized. On the northern flank of the Alps east of the Reuss as well as on the Main Alpine Ridge from Nufenen into the Bernina region and in the Upper Engadine, the avalanche prone locations occur more frequently. On Sunday, the avalanche danger levels will continue to decrease. Apart from the peril of being buried in snow, the hazards of being swept along and falling also need to be taken into consideration. A prudent route selection is recommended.

Wet-snow avalanches

As a consequence of the daytime warming cycle and solar radiation, small-sized and medium-sized wet-snow avalanches can be expected. This danger threatens most on north-facing slopes below approximately 2800 m, and in the other aspects below approximately 3600 m. More than anywhere else on north-facing slopes at high altitude, wet-snow avalanches can fracture down to more deeply embedded layers of the snow cover and sweep the entire snowmass away. Transportation routes situated at higher altitudes in particular can be endangered.

Skiing and freeriding tours in outlying terrain should be brought to a close early in the day. Also on hikes through exposed terrain at high altitudes, the avalanche dangers should be taken into consideration.

Snow and weather

Snowpack

New fallen snow from the last few days increases in amount and freshly formed snowdrift accumulations increase in frequency with ascending altitude. More deeply embedded layers inside the snow cover are thoroughly wet up to approximately 2600 m on north-facing slopes and up to over 3000 m on steep, south-facing slopes. Following nights of clear skies, the snowpack surface is generally frozen with a crust which is capable of bearing loads. On wind-protected north-facing slopes, in high alpine regions more than anywhere else, there is still loosely packed snow which on Sunday, as a result of strong-velocity northerly winds, will be transported.

At 2500 m in the Valais, on the northern flank of the Alps in northern Ticino and in northern Grisons, the snow cover is still 100 to 200 cm deep; in northern regions as much as 300 cm deep from region to region. In the remaining regions of Switzerland the snowpack is approximately 100 cm deep.

Weather review to Thursday, 19.05:

On Wednesday night, skies were heavily overcast and there was precipitation over widespread areas. The snowfall level in northern regions descended to 1500 m, in southern regions to 1800 m. On Thursday in western regions, it was partially sunny, in the other regions of Switzerland variably cloudy accompanied by showers. Winds were northwesterly, blowing at high altitudes at moderate to strong velocity. Between Wednesday evening and Friday morning above approximately 2500 m there was 15 to 30 cm of fresh fallen snow registered over widespread areas, as much as 40 cm of new fallen snow in eastern and in southern regions. On Friday, it was predominantly sunny, in eastern regions increasingly so. Northerly winds slackened off and were blowing generally at light strength. The zero-degree level ascended during the course of the day to 3000 m.

Weather forecast through Sunday, 22 May:

On Friday night, skies will be clear for the most part. On Saturday, it will be predominantly sunny, accompanied by convective cloud build-up during the course of the day. The zero-degree level will ascend to approximately 3400 m. Winds will be southwesterly, blowing at light to moderate strength, subsequently in northern regions, foehn winds will arise during the afternoon. During the course of the day on the northern flank of the Alps, skies will become increasingly overcast from the west, accompanied by light shower activity during the afternoon. Above approximately 2500 m, a few centimeters of snowfall is anticipated. Southerly winds will be blowing at moderate strength, in high alpine regions at strong velocity.

Outlook

On Monday, skies will be heavily overcast and precipitation is expected over widespread areas. The snowfall level will descend to approximately 1400 m on Monday. In southern regions, skies are expected to brighten up during the afternoon as a consequence of rising northerly winds. On Monday night in northern regions, a small amount of additional snowfall is anticipated. During the daytime on Tuesday in northern regions it will be partly sunny, in the Valais and in southern regions predominantly so. On Monday, the danger of dry-snow avalanches is expected to increase over widespread areas. The danger of wet-snow avalanches is expected to be heightened on Sunday night as a result of rainfall; furthermore, avalanche risks will be subject to a daytime danger cycle as a result of solar radiation and the daytime warming curve.

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