Answering Your Questions About the 2017 Total Solar Eclipse

The 21 August 2017 celestial event will be viewable to millions in North America, but taking the proper precautions is important.



4K

Are people selling tickets to view the eclipse?

Yes. In some areas, observatories and event planners are offering tickets to specific viewing areas and festivals, particularly along the "totality path". However, the eclipse will be above most of North America, so there is no need to buy a ticket unless you feel like paying to share the experience with like-minded strangers. Even if you do, though, most of the events appear to have sold out fairly quickly.

Will a group of coal industry people be protesting the eclipse?

A group of people purporting to be associated with the coal industry have put out a press release on 11 August 2017, saying that they plan to hold a protest in the western Kentucky town of Hopkinsville (which has temporarily rebranded itself as Eclipseville, or the "point of greatest eclipse") in order to bring attention to how important their industry is, and how it has been mistreated by the "fake news" media:

> Kentuckians for Coal is an ad-hoc coalition of miners, union officials, family members and coal users created to defend the Kentucky coal industry against encroachment from renewable energy industries and from economic development initiatives aimed at lessening America's dependence on coal. Kentuckians for Coal stands against the eclipse and those who worship it.
>
> The protest is scheduled for high noon on Monday, August 21, 2017, in front of the offices of the Kentucky New Era newspaper at 1618 E. 9th Street, Hopkinsville, just as the eclipse begins. The "totality"–the complete blocking of the Sun by the Moon–will start at 1:24:39 and will last 2 minutes and 40 seconds.
>
> The protesters chose the New Era office location because the newspaper and other fake-news media have been over-hyping the eclipse because of its potential to boost local economic development, while ignoring the importance of the coal industry.

The story has been picked up by news organizations and blogs as legitimate, but we have found several reasons to be tremendously skeptical. For example, the press release appears to have been written with tongue lodged firmly in cheek:

> Hopkinsville, with a population of 33,000, has two other great claims to fame. One is as the birthplace of the world-renowned psychic Edgar Cayce. He made his home in Hopkinsville, and died there in 1945, after predicting the date of his own death. The other is the notoriously pagan annual celebration of extra-terrestrials, which commemorates a terrifying landing by space aliens in 1955, 62 years ago to the day, known as the Little Green Men Festival.
>
> When more than 250,000 people descend on the town for four days in August, including busloads of Amish from Pennsylvania and rumored Arab royalty, hucksters will peddle overpriced souvenirs as area hotels jack up their room rates by 400%; gas stations run out of gas; and cell phone service crashes due to demand. Traffic jams, a run on available food, an invasion of prostitutes, and rowdy crowds will test the patience of both local residents and the extra law enforcement brought in to maintain order. In addition, there is the serious threat to spectators' eyesight if they look at the sun without special eclipse-viewing glasses.

Secondly, there appears to be no Joseph Calvin (no matter his rank) living in Hopkinsville, and no one has responded to a voice mail message we left at the number supplied in the release. Finally, as of 2015, there are no more union coal miners working anywhere in the state of Kentucky.

Do personal electronics such as cellphones present a danger due to "cosmic rays," "gamma rays," or "cosmic gamma rays"?

Among rumors spreading on social media about the solar eclipse were ones that involved the putative danger posed by cell phones on the day of the event:

> I heard something about comic rays and about not being able to use our phones during 12:30 p.m to 3:30 a.m

However, the claim circulated for years prior to the eclipse and still made "no scientific sense whatsoever."

Does an eclipse happen only during the full moon, new moon, or doesn't it matter?

According to NASA, eclipses can take place during a new moon, under certain circumstances:

> Eclipses only occur if the Moon is located within 0.5 degrees of the plane of the ecliptic, on a line that passes through the center of the Sun and the Earth. The Moon travels along an orbit that is inclined by 5 degrees to the ecliptic plane, so there are only two opportunities each month when it passes through the plane of the ecliptic. These points are called the ascending and descending nodes. Eclipses of the Sun only occur if new moon occurs when the Moon is near of one of these nodes. A similar argument explains why lunar eclipses do not occur every full moon at the node opposite the Sun from the Earth.

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