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Heavy Snowfall Forecast for Moscow This Week

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Leslie, 23, of Boston, Massachusetts, eating a pancake Tuesday at a Maslenitsa fest on Kamergersky Pereulok. **Vladimir Filonov**

Russian tradition might dictate that this week marks the start of spring, but weather forecasters are warning Moscow residents to brace for heavy snowfall.

The frosty, dry weather that the capital has been enjoying for the past week will change Wednesday as clouds roll in and snow falls on parts of the Moscow region, the federal weather bureau said.

"We forecast snowfall of up to two centimeters," a weather bureau official told Interfax, adding that in Moscow, residents should be on the lookout for black ice.

Snow will start to fall heavily Thursday and continue coming down through Saturday, dumping up to 18 centimeters in the city over three days, the weather bureau said.

Russians celebrate Maslenitsa this week, a holiday with pagan roots that marks the beginning

of spring and traditionally includes the copious consumption of blini, whose round, warm shape symbolizes the sun.

But weather forecasters said Tuesday that warmth from the sun would be in short supply for the next few days. Temperatures are expected to hover between minus 17 and minus 22 degrees Celsius before Wednesday night, then warm up to plus 1 degree Friday afternoon and zero degrees Saturday.

The cold has led to 27 deaths in Moscow this winter; 265 people have been hospitalized for hypothermia, Interfax reported.

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