



Snowstorms and Iowa’s High School State Basketball Tournaments Facts

Snowfall and the Girls and Boys High School State Basketball Tournaments go hand in hand. Often, we receive inquiries about expected snowfall during one or both of these tournaments. March snowfall in Iowa is quite common and to be expected. The nice thing about snowfall in March is that it won’t stay around long.

The High School State Basketball Tournaments have moved around from town to town through its history. However, this will only examine data for Des Moines from 1950 to the present and only for the first two weeks of March when the current tournaments occur. These two weeks should generally capture any snowstorms over the last 70 years that might have affected travel to and from the tournaments.

The following tables depict the top ten 24-hour snowfall totals, 48-hour snowfall totals and Week 1 and Week 2 snowfall totals for Des Moines from the period 1950-2019.

Week of March 1-7					
Ranking	24-Hour Snowfall Totals (inches)	Date	Ranking	48-Hour Snowfall Totals (inches)	Date
1.	7.8	03/05/1959	1.	8.6	03/05-06/1959
2.	7.5	03/02/1965	2.	7.5	03/02-03/1965
3.	4.6	03/03/1982	3.	6.5	03/01-02/2007
4.	4.4	03/04/2003	4.	6.4	03/03-04/1982
5.	4.0	03/05/1963	5.	4.6	03/01-02/2002
6.	3.8	03/02/1978	6.	4.5	03/04-05/2003
	3.8	03/05/1971	7.	4.5	03/04-05/1963
8.	3.6	03/02/2008	8.	4.3	03/04-05/1965
	3.6	03/01/2007	9.	4.0	03/02-03/2008
10	3.5	03/01/2014	10.	4.0	03/02-03/1978

The table above shows that in Des Moines, only two, single days and four, two-day periods over the last 70 years have received snowfalls greater than six inches in the first week of March. Six inches of snow is generally the point at which the National Weather Service would issue a Winter Storm Warning. In fact, the four two-day totals greater than six inches actually occurred in four years: 1959, 1965, 1982, 2007. In other words, during this 70 year period, there were only four snowstorms, each spanning two days that brought snowfall greater than six inches; or only 6% of the time. The other 94% of the time, in Des Moines, you can expect at least tolerable weather.

National Weather Service, Des Moines: <http://www.weather.gov/desmoines>



Week of March 8-14					
Ranking	24-Hour Snowfall Totals (inches)	Date	Ranking	48-Hour Snowfall Totals (inches)	Date
1.	12.0	03/08/1999	1.	12.1	03/08-09/1999
2.	11.0	03/08/1998	2.	11.0	03/08-09/1998
3.	8.0	03/08/1962	3.	8.7	03/10-11/1951
4.	5.1	03/10/1951	4.	8.0	03/08-09/1962
5.	4.9	03/08/1960		8.0	03/11-12/1951
6.	4.4	03/12/1951	6	5.7	03/08-09/1960
7.	4.2	03/14/1959	7.	5.1	03/09-10/1951
8.	3.6	03/08/1982	8.	4.6	03/12-13/1951
	3.6	03/11/1951	9.	4.2	03/13-14/1959
10	3.4	03/13/1961	10.	3.8	03/12-13/1961

Similarly, for the second week of March, there were only three, single days and five, two-day periods over the last 70 years that Des Moines has received snowfalls greater than six inches. Two of the five two-day periods of snow greater than six inches occurred on three consecutive days: March 9-11, 1951. Again, around 95% of the time, in Des Moines, during the second week of March, you can expect tolerable weather.

Total Snow During the Week of March 1-7			Total Snow During the Week of March 8-14		
Ranking	Amount (inches)	Year	Ranking	Amount (inches)	Year
1.	11.8	1965	1.	13.3	1951
2.	9.5	1955	2.	12.3	1999
3.	8.2	1982	3.	11.8	1998
4.	6.7	2007	4.	8.5	1962
5.	6.3	1978	5.	8.4	1960
6.	6.2	1952	6.	6.7	1961
7.	5.3	1995	7.	5.3	1959
8.	4.8	2003	8.	3.7	1982
9.	4.6	2002	9.	3.0	2013
10.	4.5	1963	10.	2.7	1970

During the first week of March, 1965, 1955 and 1982 have the highest totals. The second week has 1951 on top of the heap with the more recent years of 1999 and 1998 ranking second and third respectively.



Overall, while central Iowa might in fact have a big snowstorm in the first half of March, it's much more likely that little to no snow will fall and ruin your Basketball Tournament travel plans. Before heading out, remember to check the latest forecasts and travel conditions so you may make informed decisions regarding travel and types of clothing to pack. Above all, have a safe and fun time.