

# Mexico official: definitive COVID-19 toll will take 2 years

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Cemetery workers dig fresh graves in a section of the Valle de Chalco Municipal Cemetery which opened early in the coronavirus pandemic to accommodate the surge in deaths, in Valle de Chalco on the outskirts of Mexico City, Thursday, Sept. 24, 2020.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

Mexico's top coronavirus official said Sunday that definitive data on the country's death toll from COVID-19 won't be available for "a couple of years."

The statement by Assistant Health Secretary Hugo López-Gatell is likely to revive debate about Mexico's death toll, currently at 76,430, the fourth-highest in the world.

"When will the final statistics on deaths from COVID-19 be ready? Certainly, a couple of years after the first year of the pandemic," López-Gatell said, adding that work would be left to the country's statistics institute.

Officials have acknowledged in the past that the figure is a significant undercount, because it includes only those who died after a positive test result, almost always at a hospital. Mexico does very little testing, and many people die without a test.

But the Mexican government has avoided adjusting its death toll upward to account for people who died at home or weren't tested.

Some parts of the country like Mexico City have begun conducting their own recalculations, finding "excess deaths" likely caused by coronavirus were at least double official figures.

The issue is a significant one in Mexico, because President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has frequently compared Mexico's [death rates](#) to those of other countries in a bid to convince the public that his administration isn't doing a bad job at handling the pandemic. But many other countries have attempted to adjust official figures to account for spikes in deaths that coincide with virus outbreaks.



A member of the Moreno family opens the door to welcome a medical team arriving to home test seven members of the family for COVID-19, in the Xochimilco borough of Mexico City, Thursday, Sept. 24, 2020.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

But López-Gatell placed in doubt Sunday whether the figure was important or whether it could really be measured.

He described the definitive [death toll](#) as "one of these technical details" and said the pandemic "cannot be measured."

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