

Mexico ups COVID-19 'estimate' to 89,612 deaths

September 29 2020



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 upped its "estimated" COVID-19 deaths to 89,612 on Monday, and boosted estimates of its total number of cases to 870,699, almost 137,000 more than it previously recognized.

Even with the new estimated [death](#) toll, Mexico is still in fourth place world wide behind India, which has 95,542 deaths. But in the case of infections, the new estimates would boost Mexico from eighth place in total cases, to fifth place, behind Russia with about 1.15 million cases.

Mexico has about 76,600 test-confirmed deaths and 733,717 test-confirmed cases. But officials acknowledge those are significant undercounts, because the country does so little testing: only about 1.6 million tests have been done so far.

In a nation of almost 130 million, that means that only about one in 80 Mexicans has ever had a test. About 40% of all tests are positive, because only people with significant symptoms are tested.

Mexico had previously published "estimated" figures based on tests still awaiting results, which sometimes takes weeks.

But the new estimates released Monday by the Health Department are higher because they were calculated by adding two new groups: those who never were tested but had symptoms, and those who had tests which could not be analyzed because the samples were not handled properly. The new figures also include a proportion of pending results.

Officials revealed Sunday that almost 96,000 [test](#) swabs—equal to about 5% of all tests in Mexico—had to be thrown out because they never reached a lab, arrived too late or were not preserved in the right conditions to be tested.

The new estimates are likely to revive debate about Mexico's death toll,

because to date 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 those appear to be unsound comparisons, because many other countries have attempted to adjust official figures to account for spikes in deaths that coincide with virus outbreaks.

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."

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

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