

Mexico tops 200,000 COVID-19 deaths, but real toll is higher

March 26 2021, by Lissette Romero



In this March 17, 2021 file photo, family members attend the burial service of a relative who died from COVID-19, in the Chalco cemetery on the outskirts of Mexico City, amid the new coronavirus pandemic. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano, File)

As Mexico surpassed 200,000 test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19 Thursday, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador framed ramped-up vaccination efforts as a race against time.

The president prepared to call out more military, state and local personnel to spur the vaccination effort as more doses arrive, including a shipment of 1.7 million AstraZeneca shots the United States has "loaned" Mexico.

Mexico's total 200,211 confirmed COVID-19 deaths announced Thursday trail only the United States and Brazil, countries with larger populations. The real [death](#) toll is believed to be drawing closer to 300,000, due to the country's extremely low rate of testing.

"I think it is more. I think, for example, that the numbers on the news are not correct, I think it is higher," funeral home worker Benigno Clemente Zarate said of the [death toll](#).

Zarate said he has tended to multiple deaths in a single household.

"We have had some jobs where two or three people have died in the same household, in the same family," he said.

The Mexican government stopped publishing numbers on excess deaths at the end of 2020. The last time the numbers were reported was at the start of January, before the worst of the second wave of deaths hit.



In this May 27, 2020 file photo, a street dog sleeps amid the tombs at the San Nicolas Tolentino Pantheon cemetery as workers make space for more burials in the Iztapalapa neighborhood of Mexico City, amid the coronavirus pandemic. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte, File)

But authorities in Mexico City have published excess death figures through the end of February, and they show that January's deaths were almost 46% higher than in the city's first wave in June.

It is a dance of figures. Mexico's Health Department acknowledges almost 220,000 'estimated' COVID-19 deaths as of mid-March, but that

estimate is not based on excess death reports and probably doesn't include the considerable number of people who die at home in Mexico.

Mexico City was among the hardest-hit cities in the world. Mexico City's 9 million inhabitants suffered 38,627 deaths; with only 7.1% of the country's population, the capital has had 19.3% of the country's total deaths.

While large, closely packed cities with intensive mass transit systems may have suffered more across the globe, Mexico City also has far better health care facilities than the rest of the country. Still, the capital saw about 430 confirmed COVID-19 deaths per 100,000.



In this March 17, 2021 file photo, a cemetery worker, donning a skull tattoo on his hand, holds a cigarette during the burial service of a person who died from

COVID-19, in the Chalco cemetery on the outskirts of Mexico City. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano, File)

The human toll is overwhelming.

Patricia Silva Caudillo, 46, went to a dusty cemetery on the eastern edge of the city to bury her husband, construction worker Pedro Capilla, 51. Capilla, a diabetic, was getting dialysis treatment at a local hospital where he was apparently infected with COVID-19.

"He was everything to me," said Silva Caudillo. "He was my companion, my support."

Raquel Díaz also came to the cemetery to bury a relative. "This has left a lot of pain, a lot of tragedy, it has left so many people orphaned or widowed," Díaz said. "I don't think this pandemic has brought anything good."

López Obrador said Thursday he views it as a race against time to get all people over 60 vaccinated with at least one dose by the end of April, before a possible third wave hits.

"We have to avoid any rebound, an undesired, extraordinary situation of a rebound in infections like those that are occurring in some other parts of the world," López Obrador said. "We do not want a resurgence."



In this June 4, 2020 file photo, workers in protective gear as a precaution against the coronavirus, remove a coffin that contained the remains of a person who died from the coronavirus, at the crematorium inside the San Nicolas Tolentino cemetery in the Iztapalapa borough of Mexico City. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte, File)



In this April 29, 2020 file photo, Aurora Azamar reacts after learning that her mother died, believed from complications related to the coronavirus, outside a public hospital in the Iztapalapa neighborhood of Mexico City. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano, File)



In this Nov. 18, 2020 file photo, workers ride their horses in the Valle de Chalco municipal cemetery, mostly reserved for those who have died from the coronavirus, on the outskirts of Mexico City. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte, File)



In this June 24, 2020 file photo, crematorium workers burn the coffins that contained the remains of people who died from the coronavirus after their cremation at the San Nicolas Tolentino cemetery in the Iztapalapa neighborhood of Mexico City. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte, File)



In this Jan. 10, 2021 file photo, a patient in an isolation pod is moved from an ambulance into the COVID-19 treatment center at the Dr. Carlos MacGregor Sanchez General Hospital in Mexico City. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell, File)



In this Jan. 11, 2021 file photo, Araceli Ramirez holds the stuffed toy bear she made from a shirt that belonged to her father who died from the coronavirus, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Ramirez, who had the bear made from a warm winter shirt her father loved, said "I can talk to the bear, express what I didn't tell him, and feel like he is with me." As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Christian Chavez, File)



In this Oct. 27, 2020 file photo, workers wearing full protection gear amid the new coronavirus pandemic, lower a coffin into a grave in an area of the San Rafael municipal cemetery set apart for people who have died from COVID-19, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Christian Chavez, File)



In this May 25, 2020 file photo, Maria Del Carmen Acero Camacho, center left, embraces one of her nieces as she is reunited with her family after 21 days in the hospital battling COVID-19, in the Iztapalapa borough of Mexico City. Acero returned home weak, but vivacious, recounting to her family the kindness and encouragement of the nurses who cared for her, as well as the devastation of watching fellow patients dying around her. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell, File)



In this April 22, 2020 file photo, Marisela Briseno, right, and Mario Briseno, grieve for their relative Manuel Briseno Espino, who died from complications due to COVID-19, after family members brought his ashes back to the home where he lived with three generations of his offspring, in the Iztapalapa borough of Mexico City. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell, File)



In this Feb. 18, 2021 file photo, a medical team ascends steps up a hillside to reach the home of Maria del Socorro Fuentes to administer a shot of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine, in rural San Lorenzo Acopilco on the outskirts of Mexico City. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell, File)

It is unlikely that Mexico's approximately 6 million vaccines delivered so far have played much of a role in the statistical reduction in deaths in recent weeks, and it is unclear how many Mexican will take the shots.

The Mexican government has been widely using two Chinese-made vaccines, but suspicion remains due to a lack of information on their effectiveness, something that could encourage already widespread

skepticism.

In a March 6-9 poll, only 52% of the 1,000 Mexicans surveyed said they were willing to get vaccinated, according to the GEA-ISA polling firm; 20% said they weren't sure, and 28% said they would not get vaccinated. The poll had a margin of error of plus-or-minus 3.1 percentage points.

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