

'Not necessary' to dwell on COVID death tally, Chinese experts say

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Chinese health officials said Wednesday it was "not necessary" to dwell on the exact number of COVID deaths in the country, days after the World Health Organization criticised authorities' accounting of a surge

in cases there.

China abruptly dropped its "zero-COVID" approach last month after three years of enforcing some of the harshest anti-pandemic restrictions in the world, unleashing a wave of infections that has packed hospitals and overwhelmed crematoriums.

However, official figures have borne little resemblance to the situation on the ground and Beijing came under fire in December for drastically narrowing its definition of a COVID fatality.

"I don't think it is necessary to look into the cause of [death](#) for every case at present. The key task during the pandemic should be treatment," epidemiologist Liang Wannian, head of a government-appointed expert panel, said during a news conference Wednesday.

"If consensus can be reached globally, it would be the best," he said of the definition of COVID deaths. "If consensus cannot be reached, each country will classify it according to its own situation."

Wang Guiqiang, head of the infectious disease department at Peking University First Hospital, suggested at the same news conference China could determine the number of COVID deaths after the fact by looking at the overall excess mortality rate.

According to official figures, only 37 COVID-related deaths have been recorded in China since last month out of a population of 1.4 billion.

Under the government's revised methodology, only those who die specifically of [respiratory failure](#) caused by the virus are recorded as COVID deaths, meaning many related fatalities go uncounted.

The WHO last week criticised the new definition as "too narrow", with

emergencies director Michael Ryan saying the body believed that "the current numbers being published from China under-represent the true impact of the disease".

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the organisation was continuing to "ask China for more rapid, regular, [reliable data](#) on hospitalisation and deaths, as well as... viral sequencing".

Beijing, however, has insisted it has been transparent with the [international community](#) about its COVID data, urging the WHO to "uphold a scientific, objective and just position" on the matter.

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