



Cuba's COVID mortality and vaccination: myth and reality

September 30, 2021

Cuba has for weeks reported the highest per capita rate in the world of COVID cases. The 28-day report of September 29, 2021 reflects 213,953 cases and 2,027 deaths (accumulated totals were 872,425 cases and 7,378 deaths).¹ On September 22, 2021, Cuba (pop. 11.2 million) had the third highest number of daily positive cases (7,151) in the world --the two countries ranking higher have many times the population: the U.S. (pop. 333.4 million, with 122,624 cases) and Mexico (pop. 130.6 million, with 12,521 cases).² If the actual deaths were accurately reflected in the data, Cuba would rank even lower and might even reflect the deadliest pandemic outcome (mortality as a percentage of positive cases) for any one country to date. The plight of Cuba's citizens and a needlessly high cost in lives is a tragedy that numbers cannot describe.

From April to August 2021, the Dominican Republic (DR), with a population of 10.9 million, slightly smaller than Cuba's, reported 672 deaths from COVID, for an accumulated total of 4,002.³ During the same period, Cuba reported six times more deaths, 4,285, for an accumulated total of 4,710 deaths as of August 22, 2021. The contrast in these outcomes is even more striking because the DR, also a Caribbean island-nation, opened to international visitors on July 1, 2020⁴ with far laxer restrictions than Cuba.⁵

Such a dire result would not surprise most Cubans on the island. Cuba has the highest proportion of elderly population (16%) of all of Latin America and the Caribbean⁶ and the government has acknowledged shortages in diagnostic tests, medication and oxygen. The shortages are reported as extreme in social media and independent news, which almost daily also report on overflowing hospitals, lacking and overworked medical personnel, overburdened morgues and crematories, and mass burials of Covid victims.⁷

Cuba's health infrastructure is in shambles thanks to extreme under-investment by the socialist state, which controls almost 100% of the centrally-planned economy and has a monopoly on health. Many hospitals are filthy and falling apart, lack running water, air conditioning even in ICU units, and bed sheets; ambulances are scarce luxuries few can count on.⁸ In 2020, with a pandemic underway, just \$28.1 million were spent on public health and social assistance (0.8% of total investments) while \$4.1 billion was spent on hotel and rental property real estate. In 2015-2020, only 5%, \$854.6 million, of the \$17.6 billion spent on hotel and rental property real estate was spent in public health and social assistance.⁹ Meanwhile, the investment in repression, propaganda, a huge diplomatic corps, and an indulged intelligence service is not reported but known to be very high. While ambulances and garbage collection vehicles have been acutely lacking for many years, there was a massive presence of security vehicles on the streets for days after mass protests of last July 11th (multiple videos were posted on social media from many locations in Cuba).

The skewed allocation of resources prioritizes keeping the military-capitalist dictatorship in power. The density of surveillance by Cuba's political police well exceeds that of the Stasi, the East German secret police with the highest density of surveillance of the Soviet bloc on European soil.^{10/11} The Cuban regime also maintains a gigantic and diverse apparatus for synchronized propaganda.¹²

What is the real mortality rate from COVID?

In August 2021, Cuba's Minister of Health acknowledged that, despite a shortage in diagnostic tests, only people with a positive result at the time of death were counted as having died of COVID.¹³ Many health workers and relatives of victims have also reported in social media from Cuba that death certificates conceal COVID fatalities by reporting cause of death as pneumonia, influenza, or pulmonary embolism.¹⁴ *The New York Times* published that the official reported 8 daily deaths from coronavirus in the city of Guantánamo in August 2021 did not correspond with 69 deaths reported in just one day by a city government official on state television (the actual deaths would have been eight times higher).¹⁵ Even Cuba's state-controlled media has been informing of the death from COVID of a large number of celebrities, eminent doctors/scientists, retired military leaders, government leaders, and Communist Party figures.¹⁶

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), which typically stamps Cuba's data with its seal of approval, reported on September 22, 2021 a COVID case fatality rate (CFR)¹⁷ of 0.8 for Cuba, the lowest, by far, in all of Latin America and the Caribbean¹⁸ and one of the lowest in the world.¹⁹ This rate is purportedly an average covering the duration of the pandemic that contemplates an exceedingly low mortality rate for 15 months from March 2020 to June-2021. The official data started to reflect a higher number of cases and fatalities beginning in mid-July 2021 as social media was filled with pictures, videos, and accounts of the real situation on the ground. A comparison with the Dominican Republic is again helpful in assessing the official data. From March 2020 to March 2021, Cuba reported only 425 deaths from COVID-19 while the Dominican Republic reported 3,330 deaths.²⁰ It is possible that Cuba initially managed the pandemic much better, however, that should have allowed for a similar or better outcome over time, especially with the introduction of vaccines. The official data, in effect, presents the opposite outcome, as we saw above.

Ultimately, unless regime defectors provide the information, the real cost in lives of COVID in Cuba will remain unknown.

Cuba, a medical power or beggar state?

The situation is so dire that even small Caribbean island-nations also facing the pandemic have sent assistance to support Cuba's health system and help feed the population. Barbados, Barbados, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Dominican Republic have joined a large and growing list of governments, international agencies and organizations, corporations, and solidarity groups sending aid to Cuba (from Angola, China, Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Italy, Belize, Bolivia, France, Jamaica, Mexico, Canada, Argentina, Thailand, Panama, Switzerland, Belgium, United Arab Emirates, Malta, Spain, South Africa, India, etc.).²¹ Assistance from the Cuban diaspora in the United States, Spain, Mexico, and all over the world continues and had been estimated by economists at a rate of \$6 billion a year from the U.S. alone (pre-pandemic).²² This compounds decades of extreme external dependence on foreign assistance, aid from the diaspora, and billions in largely unpaid external debt.

Total cases, deaths & CFR (%) among PAHO countries/territories with ≥ 150,000 cumulative cases.

Country/Territory	Cases	Deaths	CFR (%)
United States of America	42,163,561	673,728	1.6%
Brazil	21,247,094	591,440	2.8%
Argentina	5,243,231	114,579	2.2%
Colombia	4,943,622	125,962	2.5%
Mexico	3,585,565	272,580	7.6%
Peru	2,168,431	199,060	9.2%
Chile	1,648,550	37,379	2.3%
Canada	1,585,732	27,488	1.7%
Cuba	825,351	6,978	0.8%
Guatemala	533,744	13,115	2.5%
Costa Rica	513,384	6,098	1.2%
Ecuador	507,020	32,661	6.4%
Bolivia	497,676	18,672	3.8%
Panama	464,781	7,178	1.5%
Paraguay	459,695	16,136	3.5%
Uruguay	387,922	6,049	1.6%
Honduras	360,598	9,561	2.7%
Venezuela	357,322	4,329	1.2%
Dominican Republic	356,042	4,031	1.1%
Puerto Rico	179,593	3,105	1.7%

*Numbers may vary due to differences in reporting



The regime peddles its unconvincing “vaccines”

The high number of COVID cases and of fatalities –reported officially and extraofficially-- is especially confounding given that Cuba reports a high vaccination rate with locally-produced “vaccines” of alleged 90% effectiveness.²³

Cuba issued emergency authorizations for three of its own locally-developed COVID “vaccines,” Soberana 02, Soberana Plus and Abdala, and reports a high rate of vaccination.^{24/25} As of September 28, 2021, over 5 million citizens had been fully vaccinated (with three doses), 46.3% of the entire population and 58.2%, of the population over age 18 (of which 75%, had two doses).²⁶ However, their ‘effectiveness is doubtful given many independent accounts of people who have died or have become gravely ill from the virus weeks after having received the full 3-dose of the Cuban “vaccines.”²⁷ A partial list of 63 doctors who had died of coronavirus until September 25, 2021, reveals that at least 53 (84%) had been fully “vaccinated.”^{28/29}

Fueling suspicions of the Cuban vaccines’ effectiveness, authorities unexpectedly announced on August 29, 2021 that in order to “impact the epidemic’s indicators,” vaccination had started in the province of Cienfuegos with the Chinese vaccine Sinopharm, donated by the Institute of Biological Products of Beijing.³⁰ The Cuban government had said in March 2021 that by the August it would have produced sufficient local “vaccines” for the entire Cuban population,³¹ so this appears to not have to do with production deficits of the local brands.

In fact, if only World Health Organization (WHO) approved vaccines are considered, Cuba **is the only country in the region --and perhaps in the world-- with a zero rate of vaccination.**³² As of August 27, 2021, more than 900 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines had been administered in the 51 countries and territories of the Americas and more than 368 million people had been fully vaccinated³³ --Cuba was the sole exception. Furthermore, PAHO had distributed more than 36 million doses in the region through the COVAX mechanism to 32 of these countries of the region.³⁴ Since early on in the pandemic, Cuba decided to not participate in the WHO/PAHO supported COVAX program for the distribution of free or subsidized COVID vaccines.³⁵

Instead, since 2020 the Cuban government embarked on an intense huge public relations and marketing campaign to sell its vaccines in development to the poor of the world.³⁶ In June 2021, Cuba reported contacts with thirty countries to sell them its vaccines.³⁷ The interested parties were mostly political allies such as Venezuela, Iran, Mexico, Argentina, Ukraine, Vietnam.³⁸ In September, Vietnam gave emergency approval to Cuba’s Abdala vaccine and agreed to purchase 10 million doses, as Venezuela had agreed to acquire 12 million Abdala doses, and Iran was producing Soberana 02 under an agreement with Cuba.³⁹

Cuba’s hyped-up “medical power” status is regularly derided by Cuban citizens on the streets and in social media. The idea of Cuba’s health system as an example for the world has been built over decades with enormous resources from Cuba’s diplomatic, intelligence, and propaganda machineries and with the help of many allies and abettors. So, the Cuban regime is not letting up despite widespread evidence to the contrary and has continued to promote its vaccines and biotechnology products. Its Minister of Health was recently touting to PAHO/WHO leaders on a select portfolio to treat COVID of three drugs for preventive use, three antivirals, two novel anti-inflammatories, and four serological diagnostics.⁴⁰

Since 2020, the Cuban government has embarked on an intense public relations’ and marketing campaign to sell its vaccines to “the poor of the world.” Interested parties to date are mostly political allies such as Venezuela, Iran, etc., and Vietnam recently granted emergency approval to Cuba’s Abdala vaccine, agreeing to purchase 10 million doses.

Given the decades-long and concerted campaign by Cuban intelligence to infiltrate and influence world health agencies and obtain active cooperation in advancing Cuba’s goals, WHO will be pressured to approve Cuba’s vaccines.

Cuba has many powerful friends and allies. PAHO alone has dedicated extensive material and human resources to promoting the Cuban health model and its alleged outstanding health achievements. (Stay tuned to our upcoming Special Report on this issue!) Just one organization from a larger list, the California-based Medical Education Cooperation with Cuba, *Medicc*,⁴¹ has a multi-million dollar budget and full-time staff solely dedicated to fostering Cuba's healthcare model and agendas.^{42/43}



Sources

¹ COVID-19 Dashboard (by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)), <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>. (Cuba occupied the 15th place in the world, however, all countries with a higher case number had many times the population of Cuba).

² Covid 19: Region of the Americas Update, PAHO/WHO, Pan American Health Organization, Sep. 22, 2021.

³ “Comparative look at COVID-19 responses and outcomes in Cuba and Taiwan,” *CubaBrief*, Center for a Free Cuba, Aug. 25, 2021.

⁴ Turismo en República Dominicana- Enero/Febrero 2021, <https://edomi.cancilleria.gob.ar/es/turismo-en-rep%C3%BAblica-dominicana-enerofebrero-2021>. (The DR opened to tourism on July 1, 2020 after a 100-day shutdown and has not even required negative COVID tests of arriving visitors since January 2021. Initially, spot-testing for COVID could be done upon entry. As of the summer 2021, there was a very high vaccination rate of personnel at hotels and tourist facilities.)

⁵ Suremys Pavón Madera, “¿Cuál es el protocolo sanitario para quienes arriben a Cuba?” *Granma*, Jun. 6, 2021. (Cuba opened in July 2020 (after a March 20, 2020 shutdown), with very strict requirements for international visitors including COVID tests for arrival and upon arrival as well as a systematic quarantine of visitors, currently down to 6 days.)

⁶ “Mortalidad por COVID-19, Evidencias y escenarios,” Observatorio Demográfico América Latina y el Caribe: 2020, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations, p. 23.

⁷ “Cuban regime dumps COVID infected bodies in backyards, mass graves,” *TheBL* 08/08/21; “Sí hay fosas comunes en Cuba, aunque la prensa estatal lo niegue,” *Santiago de Cuba, Diario de Cuba*, Aug. 2, 2021.

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⁹ “La estructura de las inversiones en Cuba profundiza su deformación: 50,3% al turismo,” *Diario de Cuba*, La Habana, May 23, 2021; Emilio Morales, “GAESA no maneja un negocio de remesas a Cuba, sino uno de lavado de capital,” *Miami*, *Diario de Cuba*, Sep. 20, 2021.

¹⁰ According to Bert Rosenthal, the Director of the International Relations Department of the Federal Commission for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic, when the Berlin wall fell, the Stasi had 91,000 officers and 179,000 collaborators for a population of approximately 17 million. The “surveillance ratio” was the highest in the Soviet bloc, followed by the KGB and then by the Czech police. Meanwhile, Cuba, with a population of around 10.6 million in 1989, had 62,000 officers working for the counterintelligence service, or political police, which represents a higher surveillance ratio than East Germany’s. (See M. Werlau, telephone interview with Máximo Omar Ruíz Matoses, op. cit; and Maria C. Werlau, Memorandum of meeting at the Commission on Stasi Records of December 9, 2005, Report of trip to Berlin, Dec. 6-11, 2005, Free Society Project, Inc.)

¹¹ Maria C. Werlau, telephone interview with Máximo Omar Ruíz Matoses, Mar. 27, 2021. (Ruíz Matoses is a former Lieutenant Colonel of Cuba’s Ministry of the Interior.)

¹² See “Cuba: Castro propaganda apparatus and foreign policy,” Central Intelligence Agency, November 1984, approved for release July 2003 (from undetermined US government agency, declassified). This report is from many years back but reveals the large investment in the propaganda apparatus documented over 40 years ago. This propaganda infrastructure remains in place and massive resources allocated to traditional as well as new means of communications.

¹³ Patrick Oppmann, “Cuban doctors voice rare criticism of government's Covid-19 handling,” Havana, *CNN*, August 22, 2021; “Ministro de Salud cubano reconoce que cifras de fallecidos por COVID-19 en la isla son inexactas,” *Radio Televisión Martí*, Aug. 19, 2021; “Ministro de Salud reconoce “tensa situación” por falta de medicamentos en Cuba,” *Asere*, Jul. 5, 2020.

¹⁴ See a sample of these reports in: Jesús Quintana, “Una enfermedad se 'expande' por los certificados de defunción en Cuba y pone en duda el conteo oficial de muertes por Covid-19,” Camagüey, *Diario de Cuba*, Mar. 19, 2021; “Regimén manipula certificados de defunción y altera las muertes por COVID-19,” *Periódico Cubano*, Aug. 19, 2021.

¹⁵ Frances Robles, “Overwhelmed by coronavirus, Cuba's vaunted health system is reeling,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 18, 2021.

¹⁶ Cuba’s Ministry of Health publishes daily reports. See “COVID-19 en Cuba,” <https://salud.msp.gob.cu/category/covid-19/>. (PAHO has also been publishing regular reports, see

¹⁷ The case fatality rate (CFR) is the ratio between confirmed deaths and confirmed cases. (

¹⁸ “Covid 19: Region of the Americas Update,” PAHO/WHO, Pan American Health Organization, Sep. 22, 2021, using data provided by Cuba. (A UN report with data to Oct. 31, 2020 reports a 1.1 mortality rate for Cuba. See “Mortalidad por COVID-19,” op. cit.)

¹⁹ “Mortality Analyses,” Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>.

²⁰ “Comparative look at COVID-19 responses and outcomes,” op. cit.

²¹ “Ministerio de Comercio Exterior ofrece detalle sobre las donaciones a Cuba Durante la pandemia y cómo se canalizan,” *Granma*, Jul 11, 2021; “Arriba a Cuba donación de islas del Caribe para enfrentar crisis del coronavirus,” *CiberCuba*, Sep. 11, 2021; “Un 'raro' antibiótico, entre los donativos sanitarios enviados por China a La Habana,” La Habana, *Diario de Cuba*, Sep. 15, 2021; Freddy Pérez Cabrera, “Nuevas donaciones de países amigos llegan a Villa Clara,” Santa Clara, *Granma*, Sep. 16, 2021.

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²³ Miguel Febles Hernández, “Efectividad e impacto del proceso de vacunación en Cuba,” *Granma*, Aug. 13, 2021; Liz Conde Sánchez, “Las evidencias sobre la efectividad de las vacunas cubanas son buenas y alentadoras,” *Granma*, Aug. 24, 2021.

²⁴ “Actualización de la estrategia para el desarrollo de las vacunas cubanas,” Ministerio de Salud de Cuba, <https://salud.msp.gov.cu/actualizacion-de-la-vacunacion-en-el-marco-de-los-estudios-de-los-candidatos-vacunales-cubanos-y-la-intervencion-sanitaria/>. (A total of 20.5 million doses had been administered.)

²⁵ On July 9, 2021. Cuba’s Center for the State Control of Medicines, Equipment and Medical Devices (CECMED) granted Authorization for Emergency Use to the Cuban vaccine ABDALA 50, produced by the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB) and on August 20, 2021 to the Cuban vaccines SOBERANA 02 and SOBERANA Plus, whose owner is the Finlay Institute of Vaccines. (Ibid.)

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²⁷ Maria C. Werlau, telephone reports from Cuba with contacts in three confidential sources in Havana and two other provinces (Anonymous Source 4, 5, and 6, May-August 2021. Among many similar social media posts, independent journalist Henry Constantin Ferreiro, from Camagüey, Cuba, posted on Facebook in mid-September 2021 that he had been trying unsuccessfully to get a Covid-19 test for seven days suffering from symptomatic illness and had finally tested positive despite having had all three dose of the Abdala vaccine, the last dose a month earlier (see <https://www.facebook.com/henry.constantin.6>, post of Sep. 15, 2021.)

²⁸ Annarella Grimal, “¿Cuántos médicos cubanos han fallecido por coronavirus?, *CiberCuba*,” Sep. 25, 2021.

²⁹ The list was developed by Gremio Médico Cubano Libre (Free Union of Cuban Doctors), <https://gremiomedicocubanolibre.com/listado-de-fallecido-covid/>. On Sep. 25, 2021, the list of deceased from COVID had names of 71 doctors, including 13 who had died in internationalist medical missions, and 5 nurses, and one laboratory worker.

³⁰ Yisell Rodríguez Milán, “Aplicación de vacuna china Sinopharm + Soberana Plus maximiza la eficacia de la inmunización en Cienfuegos,” *Granma*, Aug. 29, 2021.

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³³ “COVID-19, Respuesta de la OPS/OMS.” Informe no. 58. Aug. 27, 2021, Pan American Health Organization.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Cuba, however, has had support from Gavi (the Vaccine Alliance) for many years, and GAVI has made disbursements for Cuba from 2000-2019 of \$4,293,714. COVAX is co-led by GAVI, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and the World Health Organization (WHO), alongside key delivery partner UNICEF; its aim is to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines, and to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world.

³⁶ A. Faiola and A. Herrero, op. cit; “Ian Powell,” op. cit.

³⁷ “Paraguay solicita la compra de dosis,” op. cit.

³⁸ “El Gobierno cubano ofrece a Ucrania sus candidatos vacunales anticovid 'a precios competitivos,” *Diario de Cuba*, Jun. 8, 2021; “Paraguay solicita la compra de dosis de los candidatos vacunales cubanos contra el Covid-19,” *Diario de Cuba*, Jun. 16, 2021; “Argentina negociaría pagar los candidatos vacunales cubanos con un crédito que La Habana le debe desde 1973,” Buenos Aires, *Diario de Cuba*, Jun. 12, 2021. “Cuba willing to cooperate with Vietnam in Covid-19 vaccine supply,” VNA, Jun. 17, 2021; <https://sggpnews.org.vn/international/cuba-willing-to-cooperate-with-vietnam-in-covid19-vaccine-supply-92866.html>.

³⁹ “Vietnam to buy 10 million Cuban vaccine doses,” *France 24*, Sep. 20, 2021.

⁴⁰ Liz Conde Sánchez, “Cuba cuenta con una carpeta de productos propios contra la COVID-19,” *Granma*, Sep. 28, 2021. (This article cites a presentation by Cuba’s Minister of Health at the 59th meeting of PAHO’s Directing Council and the 73rd Session of the Regional Committee of WHO for the Americas, Virtual Session, 20-24 September 2021.)

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⁴² “El Dr. José Luis Di Fabio representante de la OPS en Cuba recibe reconocimiento de MEDICC,” <https://cuba.campusvirtualsp.org/el-dr-jose-luis-di-fabio-representante-de-la-ops-en-cuba-recibe-reconocimiento-de-medicc>;

⁴³ The Atlantic Philanthropies invested almost \$60 million from 2002 to 2018 to advance and learn about health care in Cuba, giving \$17 million in grants to Medicc, and nearly \$6 million to help normalize relations between Cuba and the U.S. (Julie Feinsilver, “The Atlantic Philanthropies - Cuba,” “The Atlantic Philanthropies, 2020.)