

Meeting | Dep. Minister for Health Lopez Gatell – 5.1.2e RIVM 5.1.2e

Date and Time : 17/08 17h NL tijd
 Interlocutor : Deputy minister for Health Lopez Gatell
 Language : English

Aim of the meeting/deliverables:

- Sharing best practices and knowledge exchange with regard to countering the Covid epidemic.
- Discussing how best to balance between the economy and public health, especially in countries like Mexico, where many have lost their (informal) businesses.
- Emphasize the importance of multilateral cooperation (G20, WHO).

Agenda of the meeting:

1. Introductions
2. Short description of the development of the outbreak in both countries
3. Sharing the lessons learnt.
4. Defining way forward.

I. Speaking points○ **INTRODUCTIONS**

- Great to have this digital meeting with you. NL is very interested in cooperating with Mexico with regard to countering the COVID epidemic.
- A visit of PM Rutte and Health Minister Bruins was planned for earlier this year, but due to the epidemic this visit had to be cancelled. We had and have many plans for cooperation with Mexico.
- We would like to share some of the Dutch experiences, regarding COVID and specifically about scaling down quarantine measures.

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- We would like to share best practices, but also to collaborate together, how can we support you?

○ **OUTBREAK IN BOTH COUNTRIES**

- Spreading of disease later in MEX than in Europe. Now at peak, or rather plateau. How does MEX government foresee to counter the spread of Covid-19?
- Congratulations for the four projects for COVID vaccination that Mexico presented on June 30th in Oslo-Norway at the CEPI.
- Very happy that NL and Mexico are working together on a vaccine, together with Oxford

University.

- Could you tell us about the current situation in Mexico? How have the past months been? I heard the government is busy with starting up the country's economy again in phases?

- **SHARING LESSONS LEARNT**

- As you might know, the Dutch approach to the COVID situation has been a bit different than in other European countries. We can share more information on this with you.

For example, we can elaborate on the following topics or others of your interest:

- Stringency of the lockdown
- Communication strategy
- Personal protective equipment
- Test and tracing

- Which best practices could you share with us?
- I have been told that schools in Mexico were closed in March, and won't reopen until the 'traffic light system' is put on green. In the Netherlands we have chosen for a different strategy. I heard in Mexico there was some publicity around the fact that school in the Netherlands reopened, and that children do not need to keep distance. If you want, I can elaborate a bit more on that policy.

- **DEFINING WAY FORWARD**

Covid-related

- We would like to work on a digital exchange between the Dutch RIVM, Dutch Min Health and the Instituto de Salud (Min Health MEX) and the local WHO office.
- With regard to Policy and knowledge exchange, we could set up a series of Webinars with Dutch and Mexican experts to continue the dialogue in order to identify specific areas of collaboration.

There are currently three NL universities present in Mexico in the field of health care: Universities of Leiden, Groningen, Erasmus. Maastricht University is interested as well.

- Regarding research initiatives, the Erasmus Medical Center might be of interest for you. There is a team of researchers working for over 20 years with Mexican counterparts from CINVESTAV.

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Beyond Covid

- I would be honored to have the opportunity to provide you with more details, as well as hear your insights on how Mexico has been responding to the crisis, and to consider potential areas of collaboration now and beyond the pandemic:
- Another field of cooperation could be affordability and availability of medicines or E-health, in order to provide every citizen easier way of access to health care. Now and in post-pandemic times.
- Antibiotic resistance could be another field for cooperation; Fighting antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is among the key priorities of Dutch health policy,

both at national and international level.

Lot of progress has been made internationally since the adoption of the Global Action Plan in 2015 and the political declaration on AMR of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly of the UN in 2016. Mexico was very involved in this process as facilitator of the political declaration.

But there is still much to be gained. International cooperation is a priority when dealing with antibiotic resistance. We would be very interested on further exchange views with Mexico on this topic.

Both NL and Mexico have also experienced problems with purification of water containing antibiotics. Several NL companies work on this topic.

II. Background

1. INTRODUCTIONS

General situation health system in Mexico

- Mexico is a country with a population of nearly 130 million people and is facing major health care challenges: problematic infrastructure, rapidly aging population, highest obesity rate in the world (73% of the population) and therefore also high rates of chronically ill people such as cardiovascular patients, diabetics, and kidney patients. The government has put prevention high on the agenda, for example by requiring manufacturers to put health information on their products. However, results are difficult to reach, since half of the population is below the poverty line.

2. OUTBREAK IN BOTH COUNTRIES

The Covid-19 situation in Mexico in short

- **State of play:** As of 25th of August, Mexican health authorities have registered close to 600.000 cases of Covid-19 in Mexico, of which 37,000 are active cases. Over 60.000 people died from the virus. WHO has expressed concern that actual numbers are a lot higher, because of the low rate of testing (0,07 out of 1000 people) and the high number of positive tests.
- **More information:** <https://coronavirus.gob.mx/datos/>
- **Reopening:** Since July many shops, companies and restaurants are (partially) reopening, with all the associated risks.
- **Government policy:** According to the government's data, the number of reported cases of Covid-19 per week started to fall in the last few weeks. This could be explained by reduced demand for testing if there are fewer cases, but it is also possible that the government is restricting testing so that fewer positive results are returned. This could help to explain why the rate at which tests come back positive has been persistently high despite the claims by the government that the peak of contagion has passed.
- **Hospital, bed and fan's occupancy:** there are 31.000 equipped beds in healthcare facilities in Mexico, around 50% has been occupied. There are over 10.000 beds with a ventilator, around 40% are occupied.
- **Healthcare professionals:** The Ministry of Health reports that since the pandemic arrived in Mexico 50.000 healthcare professional have been hired in various clinical fields. Also further personnel have been hired to support InDRE, the institution coordinating the COVID-19 testing programme carried out in public health laboratories.
- **Vaccination:** On 11th of August, the Foreign Minister of Mexico, Marcelo Ebrard, announced that Mexico has an agreement with three different companies from the United States and China to carry out phase 3 clinical trials in the search for a vaccine against covid-19. The companies are **Janssen Pharmaceutical**, **CanSino Biologics** and **Walvax**. According to experts, there is still a long way to go before the population can be vaccinated.
- The Mexican President has announced (August 11th) that the country has a fund with 100,000 million pesos to pay for vaccination, equivalent to 3,8 bln euros.
- According to the epidemiological traffic light system: 16 states are at alert level orange and 16 are at level red. In the orange traffic light, in addition to essential economic activities, non-essential companies and activities are allowed to work at 30% capacity. Mexico City is currently in orange light, there are weekly updates on this regard.

The reopening of the economy and social life

- Economic turn down: Strong contraction in economy expected (According to Banco de Mexico about 6%, according to JP Morgan about 7%).
- On May 13, President AMLO, on the advice of the National Health Council of Mexico, which in recent months advised the government in addressing the corona epidemic, decided that so-called "key sectors" such as construction, mining, and industry would continue to work may resume. This is good news for large parts of the population; the poor were particularly affected by the corona measures and often lost their income.
- Virtual classes have started on 24th of August, schools will only open when it is actually safe for everyone, meaning green light. Universities, gyms, bars and clubs are allowed to resume activities in September.
- President AMLO announced on May 13 that the MEX states can decide themselves whether they want to reopen certain sectors, based on a three-step plan. President AMLO's roadmap consists of three phases.
 1. In the first phase, some remote rural municipalities will be allowed to resume their economic and social activities, as of May 18 This concerns the approximately 270 municipalities where no Covid infections have been detected, in particular in the north and southeast of the country . Minister of Economy Marquez has indicated that companies and schools may reopen in the coming period in these "hopeful municipalities".
 2. In the second phase, the "essential" sectors of mining and industry will reopen in the period May 18-May 31.
 3. In the third phase, certain social activities, certain forms of education and a selection of other economic sectors may resume their work. Currently, Mexico is still in phase 3.

3. SHARING LESSONS LEARNT

- Roadmap: Dep. Minister Lopez Gatell will probably describe the way the abovementioned roadmap has been implemented.
- Protocols: NL embassy shared protocols about 'the new normal' with State Secretary Delgado.

Mexico's research projects for a COVID vaccine

- On June 29, the Secretaries of Foreign Relations and Health presented the four research projects through which Mexican scientists participate in the international search for the vaccine for COVID-19.
- CEPI (Coalition for Innovations in Epidemic Preparedness) is a multi-stakeholder coalition, based in Oslo, Norway, founded in 2015, that has specialized in response to epidemics. It is made up of governments, international organizations, foundations and private sector companies, in addition to the World Health Organization (WHO). Mexico, to this day, is the only Latin American country that participates in the Council of said organization.
- CEPI develops vaccines against 6 of the 9 viruses considered by the WHO to have pandemic potential and currently its efforts have focused on developing the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine. CEPI recently launched a call to achieve an unprecedented acceleration in the development of vaccines for COVID-19, financially supporting projects with the potential to achieve health authorizations in 12-18 months or less, and thus guarantee the availability of doses, enough for a widespread global deployment as soon as possible, in 2021.
- At the initiative of Foreign Minister Ebrard, to participate in these international calls, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has formed the Consortium of Innovative Scientists in Vaccines MX, a group that has worked for several weeks on the selection and preparation of four projects. The undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, Martha Delgado Peralta, coordinates Mexico's international participation in CEPI and other organizations.
- The Mexican scientific projects for the search for the vaccine against COVID-19 that participate in the CEPI call are the following:
 1. Vaccine from the Biotechnology Institute of UNAM, in collaboration with Cinvestav.
 2. Avimex-IMSS vaccine, in collaboration with UNAM and Cinvestav.
 3. DNA vaccine from ITESM and the Autonomous University of Baja California, in collaboration with the IPN.
 4. Peptide-based vaccine from the Autonomous University of Querétaro in collaboration with the IPN.

4. DEFINING WAY FORWARD

Policy and knowledge exchange:

- Affordability and availability of medicines: major problem in Mexico, medicines are relatively expensive. Corruption is a major problem in the purchase and distribution of medicines.
- E-health: hardly exists yet, but there is a lot of interest.
- Antibiotic resistance: There are problems with purification of water containing antibiotics, in production, in animal husbandry. Centrient (DSM) is very active.
- Knowledge institutes: there are three universities including medical centers active in Mexico in the field of health care: Leiden, Groningen, Erasmus. Maastricht University is interested.

NL Companies

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Opportunities beyond Covid:

- Export: Mexico imports 94% of all medical equipment, also from NL. Companies such as Philips Health, but also SME's specializing in specific equipment export to Mexico. Mexican private institutions are interested in the more expensive segment of products, while the large public sector buys price consciously. European companies have a good reputation.
- Services: an as yet undeveloped market are e-health services for the chronically ill and the elderly. population. There is much to gain from services that focus on prevention, "telemedicine" and (cheap) apps that focus on the use of clinical data. Many private and public hospitals still use paper files, but have expressed an interest in digitization technology (EPDs). Other interesting market opportunities are medical trials and insurance products.
- Manufacturing: As in other industries, international companies use Mexico as a hub to produce for the North American market. Exports to the US and Canada are easy due to the NAFTA treaty, and exports to the rest of Latin America and other countries are also relatively easy due to free trade agreements. A number of Dutch companies are active in the production of medicines, but also, for example, in hospital construction.

Labelling of food packaging to fight obesitas

- Since March a new standard on labeling of food packaging has come into effect. With this new standard ('NOM-051'), products that exceed the established limits of ingredients such as salt, calories, trans fats, saturated fats and sugars must show a black warning sticker on the label. They are also limited in their marketing for these products. The reform has been based in part on the situation in Chile, where similar regulations have previously been introduced. The Mexican government, like international and civil society organizations such as FAO and WHO, are very satisfied with the reform of the standard. The reform is seen as an aid in the fight against obesity. Mexico is the country with the highest obesity rates in the world. On the other hand, industry organizations and business are skeptical about the effect of regulation on obesity and have therefore attempted to hold back reform.
- The private sector (some NL companies such as Heineken included), also represented in the national commission, voted against the final proposal. One of its objections to the standard is that it falls short of adequately informing the consumer, since not all nutritional information and health claims should be balanced on the packaging. Another objection from companies is that this new labeling would discourage companies to make their products healthier by, for example, reducing the amount of salt or sugar: as long as certain ingredients remain above the very strict maximum values, these improvements should not be promoted and they go unnoticed by the consumer because of the black stickers on the front of the packaging.

Moreover, according to the private sector, the NOM-051 is the strictest of its kind worldwide and is not based on sound scientific research.

Multilateral level

- Last April MEX proposed resolution in UNGA (A / RES / 74/274) to continue to guarantee international cooperation and exchange of medicines, especially in Covid-19. NL supported the resolution, which was adopted.
- Min Foreign Affairs Ebrard took part in the Global Response Conference Covid-19, which EC chairman Von der Leyen organized on 4 May. Ebrard announced that MEX will contribute to the study (how much is still unknown).