

SIFTER

Pablo Neruda was poisoned to death, a new forensic report suggests

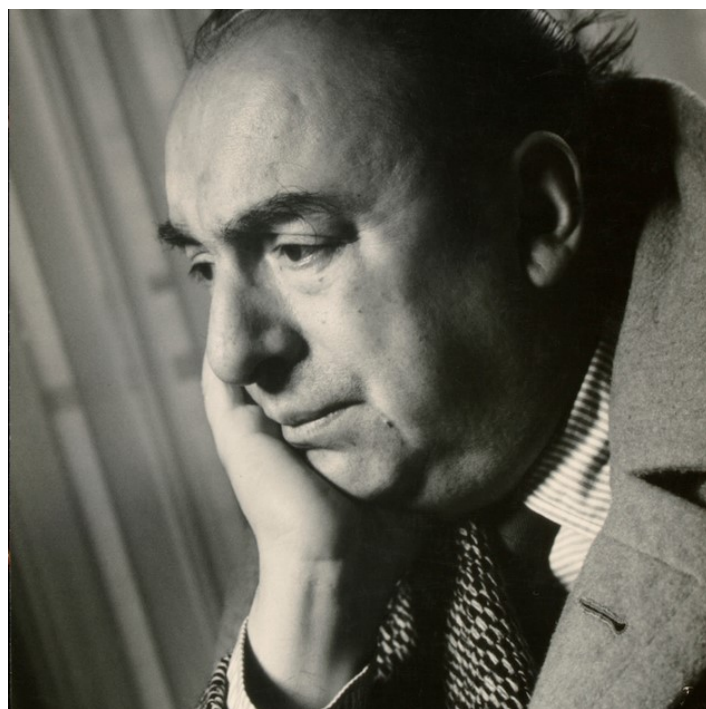
A toxicological report revealed the presence of a neurotoxin that experts say was likely administered intentionally

15 FEB. 2023 · 4:20 P.M. · BY CLAUDIA LOPEZ LLOREDA

Chilean poet and diplomat Pablo Neruda died in Santiago, Chile, in September 1973, 12 days after the country's president, Salvador Allende, was ousted by a military coup led by Chilean General Augusto Pinochet. Neruda's official cause of death was listed as prostate cancer, but many around him suspected he had been murdered by poisoning in his hospital bed because of his closeness with the overthrown president. However, the accusers lacked forensic proof.

This week, Neruda's family announced results from a recent toxicological investigation of Neruda's body that it says conclusively shows the poet was indeed poisoned. Following an exhumation order of Neruda's body 10 years ago, forensic investigators from four countries inspected Neruda's corpse for the chemical signatures of poisons, toxins, or other signs of foul play. The tests [revealed the presence of the *Clostridium botulinum*](#), a neurotoxin that paralyzes muscles and the nervous system and eventually leads to death, in the teeth of the famed writer, *The Guardian* reports.

Experts at McMaster University and the University of Copenhagen ruled out the possibility that the toxin may have leaked into the body postmortem, suggesting the probable cause of death was intentional poisoning. According to *The Guardian*, Neruda's descendants insist agents of the Pinochet-led government administered the toxin to Neruda.



Got a tip for Science's news department?

[CONNECT >](#)

Subscribe to News from Science

Don't yet have access? Subscribe to News from *Science* for full access to breaking news and analysis on research and science policy.

[SUBSCRIBE >](#)

SIGN UP FOR NEWS FROM SCIENCE DAILY HEADLINES