

World Health Organization confirms natural origins of coronavirus

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On February 9, the World Health Organization confirmed that the SARS-CoV-2 virus evolved naturally, possibly in bats in southeast China, and passed to humans either directly or through another intermediary species. It ruled out the hypothesis that the virus had been made by humans and released into the wild.

These findings were presented in preliminary fashion at a press briefing which concluded the 12-day joint WHO-China mission to study the origins of SARS-CoV-2, the virus which has caused the COVID-19 pandemic. The mission, which included 17 medical experts from 10 countries, was a follow-up to the initial January 2020 investigation into the origins of the virus and provided more details about the path of transmission from animals to humans.

The results were released at a critical stage of the pandemic. An average of more than 12,000 people are dying everyday worldwide, and a total of more than 2.34 million are now dead. There have been more than 107 million confirmed cases of the coronavirus since the pandemic began in December 2019, and nearly 26 million people have known active infections. New, more infectious and deadly variants of the virus have spawned in Britain, South Africa and Brazil, all of which threaten a renewed surge of the deadly pandemic.

The team examined four ways for the virus to have emerged, including directly from wildlife to people, from wildlife to people through some number of intermediate hosts, from wildlife to people through food and from a laboratory.

“Our initial findings suggest that the introduction through an intermediary host species is the most likely pathway and one that will require more studies and more specific targeted research,” said Dr. Peter

Embarek, a specialist in food safety and zoonotic diseases and the leader of the WHO delegation. He continued, “All the work that has been done on the virus and trying to identify its origin continue to point toward a natural reservoir.”

Such natural reservoirs include local farms, where viruses jump from animal to animal, as well as the possibility of an origin in animals from another country in Southeast Asia.

The WHO-China mission also addressed concerns that the virus was circulating widely before it was detected, noting that there was “no indication” that the virus was circulating in broader parts of the world before being detected in Wuhan at the end of December 2019. At most, epidemiological teams led by Thea Fischer found that the virus had been circulating outside of the infamous Huanan wet markets, indicating more potential ways for the virus to have begun infecting humans.

Embarek also made clear that, “the findings suggest that the laboratory incidents hypothesis is extremely unlikely to explain the introduction of the virus to the human population,” and that it would no longer be viewed as an avenue of study.

Such statements are a direct refutation of allegations first made by ruling circles in the United States and Europe last year, that the virus was made by Chinese authorities and that COVID-19 is a product of Chinese germ-warfare programs. The center of this campaign has been unfounded accusations that the virus was made and released by the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and that the Chinese government concealed this fact while stockpiling medical supplies to whether the initial storm.

This was promoted most heavily by then-US President Donald Trump, who alluded that China was

“knowingly responsible” for the pandemic. The media latched on to this narrative, with the *Washington Post* for example making the incendiary remark in an editorial that the coronavirus was “spread from the Wuhan Institute of Virology,” breathlessly noting that researchers there “had carried out research on bat coronaviruses.”

Even then, the scientific evidence clearly showed such claims to be false. A study written by US and UK biologists and published in *Nature* stated in no uncertain terms, “Our analyses clearly show that SARS-CoV-2 is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.” A different study from a group of US physicians wrote in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that, “SARS-CoV-2 did not escape from a jar.”

Those same physicians also noted the coronavirus “RNA sequences closely resemble those of viruses that silently circulate in bats, and epidemiologic information implicates a bat-origin virus infecting unidentified animal species sold in China’s live-animal markets.” They further commented on the increasing likelihood of encountering zoonotic disease. “It took the genome of the human species 8 million years to evolve by 1 percent. Many animal RNA viruses can evolve by more than 1 percent in a matter of days. It is not difficult to understand why we increasingly see the emergence of zoonotic viruses.”

Moreover, it is a matter of public record that Chinese health authorities reacted swiftly to the emergence of the new coronavirus. The Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported a cluster of pneumonia cases on December 31, 2019. China informed the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on January 3 and on January 7 identified the virus that causes COVID-19. Chinese health authorities updated the WHO and warned of the dangers of human-to-human transmission of the disease.

On January 22, Beijing locked down Wuhan and the entire province of Hubei to contain the spread of the disease. This allowed the country to contain and suppress the virus to the extent that there has been no reported death of the coronavirus in China since last May. It is not a statement of political agreement with the Chinese government to admit these facts.

The opposite is now taking place in the United States, Brazil, Europe and other world powers. In the face of

emerging and more infectious variants, lockdown measures are being lifted as swiftly and completely as possible. It was the unimpeded circulation of the coronavirus in animals that allowed it to evolve to infect humans in the first place, and it is the unimpeded circulation in humans that is making the virus more deadly.

As WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus noted in remarks on Monday, “These results are a reminder that we need to do everything we can to reduce circulation of the virus with proven public health measures.” He again stated that non-pharmaceutical interventions, which include lockdowns of schools and nonessential businesses, are critical in “denying the virus the opportunity to spread, and the opportunity to change in ways that could make vaccines less effective.”



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