



# Second WHO COVID-19 origins investigation will examine lab leak hypothesis

by [Jerry Dunleavy, Justice Department Reporter](#) | 📧 | July 20, 2021 08:06 PM

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The World Health Organization's leader laid out plans for a follow-up investigation into COVID-19's origins, including the possibility it may have escaped from a Chinese lab, following a widely panned WHO-China joint study that deemed a Wuhan lab leak "extremely unlikely."

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The first WHO team's visit to Wuhan earlier this year essentially dismissed the lab leak hypothesis while contending that a jump from animals to humans was most likely. The report was widely considered a failure, in part due to a lack of access to key data and Chinese influence over the investigation.

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Meeting minutes from discussions between lab scientists and the WHO-China team reveal lab leak concerns were referred to as "conspiracy theories."

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Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the WHO, [said](#) Friday the WHO-China report "identified areas for further study" and said the WHO's secretariat had provided a circular letter to the U.N. agency's member states laying out the so-called "phase two" investigation into how COVID-19 emerged, including the "next steps" to "advance those studies."

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Tedros

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described five main areas, with the final one being "audits of relevant laboratories and research institutions operating in the area of the initial human cases identified in December 2019." Tedros [said](#) the day before that "there was a premature push to, you know, especially reduce one of the options, like the lab theory."

A State Department [fact sheet](#) released in January contended Wuhan lab researchers "conducted experiments involving RaTG13, the bat coronavirus identified by the WIV in January



conducting ‘gain-of-function’ research to engineer chimeric viruses.” The fact sheet also asserted the lab “engaged in classified research, including laboratory animal experiments, on behalf of the Chinese military” and that lab workers became sick with coronavirus-like symptoms in autumn 2019.

The U.S. intelligence community [said](#) at least one of its 18 agencies is leaning toward the lab leak hypothesis, and President [Joe Biden](#) ordered all of the spy agencies to “redouble” investigative efforts.

Tedros said Friday the other four areas to be investigated further as part of the search for COVID-19’s origins were “integrated studies” of humans, wildlife, captive and farmed animals, and the environment; studies “prioritizing geographic areas with the earliest indication of circulation of SARS-CoV-2, and neighboring areas where other SARS-related coronaviruses have been found in non-human reservoirs;” studies of “animal markets in and around Wuhan;” and studies related to “animal trace-back activities, with additional epidemiology and molecular epidemiology work, including early sequences of the virus.”

“I agree that finding the origins of this virus is a scientific exercise that must be kept free from politics,” Tedros said. “For that to happen, we expect [China](#) to support this next phase of the scientific process by sharing all relevant data in a spirit of transparency. Equally, we expect all member states to support the scientific process by refraining from politicizing it.”

Tedros also announced the WHO was establishing a permanent International Scientific Advisory Group for Origins of Novel Pathogens, a group he said, “Will play a vital role in the next phase of studies into the origins of SARS-CoV-2, as well as the origins of future new pathogens.”

Rep. Michael McCaul, the ranking GOP member of House Foreign Affairs Committee, told the *Washington Examiner*: “While I am still concerned about Director-General Tedros’s mishandling of the early stages of this pandemic, and his parroting of CCP talking points, I am glad to see the WHO finally taking the lab leak question seriously.”

The China Task Force leader added: “The March 2021 report issued by the WHO was tainted by the CCP, and the investigation was very inadequate. The CCP continues to deny the world access to the raw data and samples we need to determine the origins of COVID-19. A



evidence contained there.”

China's state-run *Global Times* meanwhile [claimed](#) that “more than half a million Chinese netizens have signed a joint letter to the WHO ... demanding the organization conduct an investigation into the U.S.'s Fort Detrick lab” and that “the move came as certain Western politicians and media stirred up a new round of the smear campaign of pinpointing China as the culprit for the coronavirus origin.”

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Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Monday said: “Any attempt to peddle intelligence-led origin-tracing in disregard of science and truth, and coerce experts and scholars in pursuit of one's selfish interests will only disrupt global anti-epidemic cooperation, meet with strong opposition from the international community, and lead to nowhere.

“Nothing will prevail over the will of the people. It has long been known to all that the U.S. is trying to engage in political manipulation and shift blame to China.”