# New study suggests Covid-19's origins span wider geography and earlier dates than thought



# New Research Sheds Light on the Origins of Covid-19, Suggesting a Broader geographical Context

Recent findings from researchers at the University of California, San Diego, have stirred the ongoing debate regarding the origins of Covid-19, suggesting that the virus may not have originated in China as previously believed. The study indicates that SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for the pandemic, likely began evolving in bats much earlier than the initial outbreak in Wuhan, potentially tracing back to as early as 2012. This revelation challenges the notion of a singular geographic origin, indicating a complex ecological backdrop for the virus’s evolution.

By analysing over 100 coronaviruses collected from horseshoe bats, the researchers were able to draw a comprehensive evolutionary timeline, showing that the closest relatives to SARS-CoV-2 emerged between five to seven years prior to the outbreak that engulfed the world in late 2019. Intriguingly, the study draws parallels with the SARS outbreak of 2002, whereby SARS-CoV-1's closest relatives were located far from where the outbreak originated in Guangdong, southern China. This pattern suggests that the geographical distance between bat reservoirs and outbreak sites may not be as significant as once assumed.

This latest study posits that the ancestral viruses of Covid-19 emerged far from Wuhan—between 600 to 1,200 miles away—indicating a probable intermediary host in the transmission chain. Species such as raccoon dogs or civets, which are often sold in wildlife markets, may have acted as conduits for the virus's leap into humans. This line of reasoning resonates with prior studies of the original SARS outbreak, where civets were implicated as the key intermediaries.

Dr. Joel Wertheim, a senior author on the paper and an esteemed infectious disease expert, emphasized the implications of these findings. “At the start of the Covid pandemic, people worried the distance between Wuhan and the bat virus reservoir was too vast for a natural origin,” he remarked. “This paper shows that it isn't unusual.” The study also highlights that several live animal markets in Wuhan were documented as selling species susceptible to bat viruses prior to the outbreak, reinforcing the narrative of zoonotic transmission as a feasible pathway for the virus's emergence.

Nonetheless, the research leaves open the possibility of a lab leak scenario, a theory endorsed by various experts and intelligence agencies, including the FBI and CIA, which posits that SARS-CoV-2 could have accidentally escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, where coronaviruses were under study at the time. Dr. Simon Clarke, an infectious diseases expert from the UK, noted that while the findings lend credence to the theory of an animal origin, they do not conclusively eliminate the lab leak hypothesis. He stated that comprehensive investigations into the origins of the virus remain a crucial endeavour, as both animal-to-human transmission and lab escape theories carry significant implications for public health.

This discourse is further complicated by recent geopolitical tensions. In a striking response to accelerating claims that the virus originated from a lab leak in China—a theory prominent in U.S. political circles—Chinese authorities released a white paper asserting that Covid-19 may have originated in the United States. The document accuses the U.S. of deflecting blame for its pandemic response failures, advocating for an "in-depth investigation" into America's role in the virus's emergence.

China's assertion introduces a new layer to the ongoing discourse around Covid-19's origins. Their claim references historical respiratory illnesses that may have occurred in the U.S. before the global outbreak, as suggested in their white paper. This defensive stance not only reinforces China's insistence on its transparency and cooperation with the World Health Organization but also aims to sidestep the scrutiny surrounding Wuhan's role in the pandemic's inception.

As the search for Covid-19's origins continues, the insistence on thorough, unpoliticised investigation remains paramount. The complexities of virus transmission pathways—from bats to humans, through intermediary species, or even through laboratory mishaps—underscore the necessity for collaborative scientific efforts to disentangle these events. Going forward, a clearer understanding of the virus's lineage could potentially inform public health strategies, enhancing global preparedness for future pandemics.

The interplay between scientific inquiry and political narratives emphasises the need for transparency and cooperation among nations in order to foster an environment conducive to critical research that informs global health responses. Without such collaboration, the origin of this devastating virus may remain shrouded in uncertainty for the foreseeable future.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687461/covid-origin-study-not-china.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://time.com/5870481/coronavirus-origins/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687461/covid-origin-study-not-china.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.huffingtonpost.es/life/salud/china-termina-investigacion-origen-covid19nala-eeuu-posibles-causantes.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687461/covid-origin-study-not-china.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.huffingtonpost.es/life/salud/china-termina-investigacion-origen-covid19nala-eeuu-posibles-causantes.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687461/covid-origin-study-not-china.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-releases-white-paper-covid-19-origins-tracing-xinhua-reports-2025-04-30/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687461/covid-origin-study-not-china.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-releases-white-paper-covid-19-origins-tracing-xinhua-reports-2025-04-30/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://as.com/actualidad/sociedad/china-da-carpetazo-a-la-investigacion-del-origen-del-covid-y-apunta-directamente-a-eeuu-n/), [[6]](https://cadenaser.com/nacional/2025/04/30/china-da-por-concluida-la-investigacion-sobre-el-origen-del-covid-19-y-apunta-a-eeuu-entre-los-posibles-causantes-cadena-ser/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-releases-white-paper-covid-19-origins-tracing-xinhua-reports-2025-04-30/), [[7]](https://apnews.com/article/bed5ab50dca8e318ab00f60b5911da0c)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14687461/covid-origin-study-not-china.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-releases-white-paper-covid-19-origins-tracing-xinhua-reports-2025-04-30/> - In response to U.S. claims that COVID-19 originated from a lab leak in China, China released a white paper asserting that the virus may have originated in the United States. The document criticizes the U.S. for politicizing the virus’s origins and references a Missouri lawsuit that charged China $24 billion for hoarding medical supplies and covering up the outbreak. The white paper emphasizes that China had cooperated with the World Health Organization (WHO) and shared data timely, citing a joint WHO-China study that deemed a lab leak from China 'extremely unlikely.' It urges the U.S. to address growing international concerns and notes that some evidence suggests the virus could have emerged in the U.S. before its official timeline and prior to China’s outbreak. This comes as the CIA renewed its theory in January, with low confidence, that a Chinese lab leak was more likely than natural origins. China’s National Health Commission now calls for origin-tracing efforts to be directed at the U.S.
3. <https://www.huffingtonpost.es/life/salud/china-termina-investigacion-origen-covid19nala-eeuu-posibles-causantes.html> - El Gobierno chino ha concluido oficialmente su investigación sobre el origen del Covid-19 y sugiere que el virus pudo haberse introducido en Wuhan desde el extranjero, incluyendo Estados Unidos, a través de la cadena de frío. Esta conclusión se recoge en un documento oficial titulado 'Libro Blanco sobre las Acciones y la Posición de China sobre la Prevención y el Control del Covid-19 y el Rastreo del Origen del Virus', difundido por la agencia estatal Xinhua. El informe rechaza las conclusiones del estudio conjunto de 2021 con la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS), que planteaba hipótesis que apuntaban a un origen local, como la transmisión de animal a humano o desde un huésped intermediario. A pesar de insistencias recientes de la OMS para que China proporcione más datos sobre el origen del virus, el gobierno chino da por cerrada la investigación, destacando que no hay pruebas concluyentes que contradigan su versión. Asimismo, el documento menciona enfermedades respiratorias ocurridas en Estados Unidos en 2019, insinuando una posible relación con el Covid-19.
4. <https://as.com/actualidad/sociedad/china-da-carpetazo-a-la-investigacion-del-origen-del-covid-y-apunta-directamente-a-eeuu-n/> - China ha anunciado oficialmente el cierre de su investigación sobre el origen del COVID-19 mediante la publicación de un libro blanco a través de la agencia Xinhua. En el documento, el gobierno chino niega que Wuhan sea el punto de origen del virus y plantea la hipótesis de que el SARS-CoV-2 pudo haber llegado desde el extranjero a través de la cadena de frío, una teoría introducida en 2021 en colaboración con la OMS. Además, de forma indirecta, sugiere que Estados Unidos podría haber estado involucrado, aludiendo a brotes respiratorios en ese país antes de diciembre de 2019. Pese a las reiteradas solicitudes de la OMS para acceder a datos clínicos completos de los primeros casos en Wuhan, China da por concluida cualquier futura investigación territorial. Esta decisión unilateral complica llegar a un consenso internacional sobre el origen de la pandemia, en un contexto de tensiones geopolíticas y teorías contrapuestas. La falta de acceso a investigaciones independientes podría mantener sin resolver el origen del virus durante años, según advierte la OMS.
5. <https://time.com/5870481/coronavirus-origins/> - The article chronicles the global efforts to trace the origins of COVID-19, the deadly virus responsible for a worldwide pandemic. It recalls how bats, hunted for survival during Mao-era collectivization in China, harbored viruses found in Shitou Cave, identified by scientist Shi Zhengli. Shi discovered RaTG13, a bat coronavirus with 96.2% similarity to SARS-CoV-2, pointing bat colonies as the origin for COVID-19. The search for 'patient zero' remains critical to understand how the virus spread worldwide, impacting millions and costing the global economy massively. The article details political disputes regarding the virus’s origins and the importance of scientific collaboration and extensive genetic sequencing to map the mutation and spread of the virus. Ongoing research emphasizes public health measures, vaccines, and tracking methodologies to prevent future outbreaks, spotlighting how closely partnering science and public health is essential in combating pandemics over political interests.
6. <https://cadenaser.com/nacional/2025/04/30/china-da-por-concluida-la-investigacion-sobre-el-origen-del-covid-19-y-apunta-a-eeuu-entre-los-posibles-causantes-cadena-ser/> - El Gobierno de China ha anunciado la conclusión de su investigación sobre el origen del COVID-19, señalando a Estados Unidos como uno de los posibles causantes. En un documento titulado 'Libro Blanco sobre las Acciones y la Posición de China sobre la Prevención y el Control del COVID-19 y el Rastreo del Origen del Virus', divulgado por la agencia Xinhua, se sostiene que el coronavirus pudo haber llegado a Wuhan desde el extranjero a través de productos de la cadena de frío. Esta afirmación contrasta con el informe conjunto de 2021 con la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS), que consideraba 'extremadamente improbable' una fuga de laboratorio, y atribuía mayores probabilidades a un origen zoonótico. No obstante, China defiende que sus investigaciones apuntan a que Wuhan no fue el origen del virus. Además, el documento sugiere que el virus podría haberse originado en EE.UU., citando brotes respiratorios ocurridos en ese país entre mayo y octubre de 2019. A pesar de este nuevo informe, la OMS instó a China en 2024 a compartir más datos para esclarecer el origen de la pandemia.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/bed5ab50dca8e318ab00f60b5911da0c> - La búsqueda de los orígenes de la COVID-19 en China ha sido obstaculizada por luchas políticas y esfuerzos frustrados, ya que el gobierno chino congeló tanto esfuerzos internos como internacionales desde las primeras semanas del brote, según una investigación de Associated Press. El cierre de laboratorios, el fin de colaboraciones y la obstrucción de científicos extranjeros son parte de un patrón que persiste. A pesar de las primeras sospechas sobre si el virus provino de un animal o de un accidente de laboratorio, no se ha encontrado evidencia suficiente para confirmar ninguna teoría. La falta de cooperación y la política han complicado los intentos, y han enfriado las relaciones entre EE.UU. y China. A nivel interno, China se ha defendido afirmando transparencia y esfuerzos significativos en la investigación de los orígenes del virus. Sin embargo, la falta de reformas y la represión de datos críticos han dejado al mundo vulnerable y han dificultado resolver definitivamente el origen del virus.