



Top vaccine scientist demands Wuhan probe as coronavirus 'adapted to infect humans'

Professor Nikolai Petrovsky said Covid-19 appeared to have an 'exceptional' ability to enter human bodies from day one. He added the theory it had originated in a lab could not be ruled out

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By **Chiara Fiorillo**

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A vaccine scientist is demanding an investigation into the origins of Covid-19 after a team of researchers found the **coronavirus** "uniquely adapted to infect humans".

Professor Nikolai Petrovsky, a researcher who headed the Australian team, said the virus was "not typical of a normal zoonotic [animal to human] infection" since it appeared with the "exceptional" ability to enter human bodies from day one.

He added the virus could have been transmitted by an animal in "a freak event of nature," but Privacy at it had originated in a laboratory could not be ruled out.



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The Wuhan Institute of Virology in Wuhan

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need to evolve".

Prof Petrovsky suggested the virus could have been transmitted to humans due to natural causes, but he did not dismiss the idea that this pandemic might have been created in a laboratory.

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He added: "The implications may not be good for scientists or global politics, but just because the answers might cause problems, we can't run away from them.

"There is currently no evidence of a leak but enough circumstantial data to concern us. It remains a possibility until it is ruled out."

The Wuhan Virology Institute, in the Chinese city where Covid-19 was first identified, has three live strains of bat coronavirus onsite, but none match the new contagion wreaking chaos across the world, its director has said.



During an interview with broadcaster CGTN, Wang Yanyi said the centre has "isolated and
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The lab has said it received samples of the then-unknown virus on December 30, [The Telegraph](#) reports.

Wang said in the interview that before it received samples in December, their team had never "encountered, researched or kept the virus".

"In fact, like everyone else, we didn't even know the virus existed," she said.

"How could it have leaked from our lab when we never had it?"

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A worker standing inside the P4 laboratory in Wuhan

The disease, which apparently originated from a seafood market in the Chinese city of Wuhan, has infected more than 5.4 million people worldwide and killed 344,206, according to the latest figures.

Richard Ebright, one of the world's leading biosecurity experts, told The Mail on Sunday that the possibilities of the new virus having such rare components and happening naturally were "possible - but improbable".

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He also added that if Sars-CoV-2 was a natural event, another related virus could erupt again from the same source, causing "far worse mortality rates".

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 **Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison called for an inquiry into the origins of Covid-19** (Image:

LUKAS COCH/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock)

Last month, Scott Morrison, Australia's prime minister, said that there should be an international independent inquiry into the source of the pandemic in China.

The initial motion put forward by the EU and Australia called for the World Health Organisation and World Organisation for Animal Health to conduct "scientific and collaborative field missions" and "identify the zoonotic source of the virus and the route of introduction to the human population, including the possible role of intermediate hosts".



A UK source said that the resolution co-sponsored by London would now call for a review into the international response and was being backed by China and the US.

A Foreign Office spokesman said: "There will need to be a review into the pandemic, not least so that we can ensure we are better prepared for future global pandemics.

"The resolution at the World Health Assembly is an important step towards this."

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