Veille citoyenne d'information sur les OGM et les semences

Origin of Covid-19: laboratory leak is the most likely scenario (part 2)

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Publié le 15/09/2025, modifié le 09/03/2026

After describing the main issues and key players (part 1)[i], we will now trace the prehistory of Covid-19, followed by its history, which has received more media coverage.



What research does the WIV conduct?

All we know about the research carried out by the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) is what has been published in articles, since this research is partially covered by military secrecy. In 2015, Shi and Baric published an article[ii] to prove that they had genetically modified a SARS-CoV virus to

make it more suitable for humans than bats. The technique they describe is a Gain of Function (GOF) and its product is a GMO. It should be noted here that the Editor of the article added a subsequent statement: "*We are aware that this article serves as the basis for unverified theories that the new coronavirus responsible for COVID-19 was manufactured. [...] Scientists believe that an animal is the most likely source of the coronavirus*". The scientific debate is in fact much more nuanced than the Editor suggests. The article even acknowledges that "*scientific reviewers may consider similar studies constructing chimeric viruses from circulating strains too risky to pursue*".

Each species has receptors on its cells, which are like locks that may be specific to that species. These receptors allow viruses, with molecules on their surface which are like keys, to enter these cells or not. If the virus key fits the cell receptor, it can infect the cell and then multiply there. Often, a receptor is found in one species and not in another, meaning that viruses are virulent against certain species and not against others. Differentiation between species protects certain species. This is the same argument as the one against genetic clones and standardised lines in industrial agriculture. Because they are too similar, they expose the entire field to eradication. Difference protects.

In 2018, P. Daszak, Z. Shi and R. Baric proposed a project (called DEFUSE[iii] and worth $14 million) to insert a furin site[iv] into the spike protein of SARS-CoV. What does this involve? Returning to our image of the '*key*' and the '*lock*', the spike protein has a small part (RBD, or Receptor Binding Domain) which is in fact the '*key*' for the virus to the cell. But the furin site also allows the virus to better activate the opening of the cell's lock. Not only is the '*key*' (RBD) adapted to the '*lock*' (receptor), but it also turns in the '*lock*' thanks to the furin site. In short, the virus is therefore much more infectious. It is also a GOF. Such research was prohibited in the United States, and the funding request was therefore rejected[v]. However, the WIV still had the means to conduct these experiments and EcoHealth Alliance to fund them. We may never know whether they did so or not. In any case, it turns out that the SARS-CoV2 of Covid sequenced at the end of 2019 in Wuhan has just such a furin site and that in the very large family of sarbecoviruses, which includes SARS, it is the only one to have it.

A preliminary version of the DEFUSE project proposed that this project be carried out not in the P4 section, but in the P2 section of the WIV so that it would be "*highly cost-effective*"[vi]. However, Baric had pointed out that "*US researchers will likely freak out.*" because of its safety conditions. The same Baric wrote to Daszak after the pandemic began: "*I have no doubt that they [the WIV researchers] followed the rules set by the state and carried out the work under BSL2. Yes china has the right to set their own policy. You believe this was appropriate [experimental] containment if you want but don't expect me to believe it. Moreover, don't insult my intelligence by trying to feed me this load of BS.*" [vii].

Genetic data suggests that the SARS-CoV2 virus only recently acquired this furin site[viii]. Although scientists in Wuhan published the first sequencing of the virus on 3 February 2020[ix], it should be noted that they did not mention this site at that time. On the same day, 3 February 2020, French and Canadian researchers revealed the existence of this furin site[x]. Other Chinese scientists submitted an article on 11 April 2020, published on 6 May, studying its role[xi].

A history of the COVID-19 pandemic

The Wall Street Journal revealed that several scientists on Dr Shi's team, including one of the scientists in charge of the DEFUSE project in Wuhan (Dr Ben Hu), fell ill in November 2019 with symptoms similar to those of COVID-19[xii]. However, when this was revealed, Dr Hu denied having been ill[xiii].

In February 2023, Republican members of the US Senate wanted to create a subcommittee to investigate the historical origins of SARS-CoV2. Their (highly political) logic was to prove that China was the cause, without, of course, asking whether the United States and its laboratories had funded this research and trained Chinese researchers, or whether US laboratories were conducting or had already conducted the same research. Even though their logic was biased against China and in favour of protecting US researchers and funding, they investigated, which others refused to do because they defended official '*science*'. The subcommittee was able to retrieve the contents of some WIV computers through espionage and was able to show that WIV members had fallen ill, as reported by the Wall Street Journal and denied by Chinese researchers[xiv]. It found a great deal of other information.

Daszak testified before this committee that he was unaware of the existence of viruses collected after 2015 by the WIV[xv] and that he had not asked the WIV whether it had begun research on furin site insertion[xvi], even though he was funding this work and should therefore have received reports on it. The US administration (under President Biden) was not entirely convinced and suspended all federal funding for Daszak and his association, EcoHealth Alliance.

This subcommittee showed that, on 12 November 2019, WIV researchers sent a memorandum to their Chinese supervisory authority in very vivid administrative language. This memorandum showed that they were facing a very big problem that needed to be solved: "*these viruses arrive without a shadow and leave without a trace*"[xvii]. The subcommittee recruited Toy Reid, a specialist in Chinese translation. He explains that the Chinese Communist Party has created a language (called pishi) that is difficult to understand, even for a native Mandarin speaker. According to him, the sentence quoted above is indeed a sign of a serious flaw.

Following this memorandum of 12 November 2019, Ji Changzheng, Director of Technology Safety and Security at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, visited the WIV on 19 November to "*deliver the oral instructions and written requests of the government and the Party Central Committee regarding security, and the need to implement the important security instructions of General Secretary Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang.*" He "*presented an in-depth analysis [...] that strikingly revealed the complex and serious situation in which your work on [bio]security currently finds itself*"[xviii]. Inspections are annual, and the last one at the WIV was in April 2019. In Chinese language and culture, references to Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang convey a very strong argument from authority. Nine other safety inspections do not use this line of communication[xix]. On the same day, the WIV issued a call for tenders for an air incinerator that kills all organisms in air that is to be rendered germ-free[xx]. This is a palliative measure to compensate for normal safety conditions (HEPA), which are not working.

In search of patient zero...

The information reveals contradictions between the few truths and the statements made by governments. We do not know the truth.

The first case of a COVID-19 patient documented by the Chinese government is a resident of Hubei province (where Wuhan is located, without further details on the exact location), who is believed to have contracted the virus on 17 November 2019[xxi]. However, as early as mid-October, the US consulate in Wuhan knew that the city had been hit by an unusually virulent seasonal flu[xxii]. Was it COVID-19?

In France, thirteen French patients who had undergone routine testing during the week of 4 November 2019 were found to be carriers of the virus[xxiii]. The first French cases would therefore

predate the first reported Chinese cases!

In Italy, researchers at the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (National Institute of Health) analysed wastewater samples. They found SARS-CoV2 in Milan and Turin from 18 December 2019[xxiv]. Other Italian researchers analysed blood samples taken between September 2019 and March 2020. They found antibodies associated with the SARS-CoV2 '*key*' (RBD) in patients as early as 3 September 2019 in the Venice region, 4 September in Emilia-Romagna and 5 September in Liguria [xxv]. This measurement is reliable and it can be assumed that the virus was circulating in Italy as early as the beginning of September. However, the first two officially recognised Italian patients were recorded on 30 January 2020. They were two tourists returning from China.

The first reported case in the United States returned on 15 January 2020 from Wuhan, where he had not visited the animal market. He developed a characteristic cough on the 15th and consulted the hospital on 19 January. He had SARS-CoV2 (confirmed by PCR test) and survived[xxvi].

The failure of China and other countries to detect and report the disease led to the assumption that it was spreading very quickly, when in fact it had already been present for some time...

... that no country wants to identify

The military laboratory at Fort Detrick (Maryland, United States) was closed in 2009 because it stored viruses not listed in its database. On 5 August 2019, it was closed again by the Army Medical Institute for Infectious Disease Research (NIAID) because it did not have "*sufficient systems in place to decontaminate wastewater*"[xxvii]. The problem dated back to May 2018. However, a disease called EVALI, which causes respiratory distress, had been developing in the surrounding area, as well as in many US states, since 2012. At first, it was thought that this disease was COVID-19, but the cause was later found: it was an ingredient in cannabis (THC) in vaping oils [xxviii]. Once this ingredient was removed, the symptoms disappeared. This disease is not transmissible. EVALI is therefore not COVID.

Chinese government spokespeople quoted Larry Romanoff, supposedly a leading American scientist (although he is Canadian, not leading and not scientist) teaching at Fudan (where he cannot be found), to accuse the Fort Detrick laboratory of a laboratory leak. In fact, Larry Romanoff is nothing more than a propagandist replicating the methods of the USSR (the Soviet INFEKTION or Denver project to claim that the same Fort Detrick laboratory was the cause of the HIV virus[xxix]). He is well described in a *France Television* documentary analysed by Paul Charon, which shows that he has lied several times[xxx]. This lead does not seem solid to us.

In October 2019, sports games between military personnel from different countries were organised in Wuhan. Members of the US delegation fell ill with suspicious coughs. Was this an illness apparently linked to an ingredient in vaping liquids[xxxi], COVID that the US military imported into China from Fort Detrick, or COVID that the Chinese transmitted to military personnel from other countries? Chinese spokespeople quoted a journalist, George Webb, who supported the second theory. US newspapers then defended their country by explaining that "*Chinese state-run media are citing an American conspiracy theorist to push claims that coronavirus was brought to China by a U.S. military athlete*"[xxxii]. Clearly, journalists have a national bias, using accusations of conspiracy to discredit an individual and the country (China here) that quotes him. Neither side bothers to present arguments. However, George Webb does not provide any solid evidence about these military games. In particular, no military personnel have been diagnosed with or had COVID-19. One might even think that the military knows if its troops have had COVID. What is hidden by the fact that they are not saying so? A US State Department investigator, David Asher, also claims

that this hypothesis is certain according to his sources... which he does not disclose[xxxiii]. Logically, China asks, "*when did patient zero appear in the United States? How many people are infected? In which hospitals? It could be the US military that brought this epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make your data public! The United States owes us an explanation!*"[xxxiv]. The media is a tool for States to avoid answering each other and to hurl insults at each other.

An article in *Le Monde*[xxxv] takes up this line of thinking and concludes that states would have something to gain by declaring that their military personnel had contracted the disease upon returning from Wuhan. They would then be considered victims. Why has no state announced anything? Neither the United States nor China.

Since there were patients in Italy as early as 3 September 2019, these theories are probably insufficient. Furthermore, it has been noted that some Chinese samples from the first cases were destroyed[xxxvi]. China identified 260 cases in December 2019, but only reported 174 to the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2021[xxxvii]. Those reported were linked to the animal market. Why report only cases linked to the animal market, unless the intention was to steer the interpretation of the origin of COVID towards it?

The WHO confirmed that the first cases appeared in early December 2019, "*however, these cases had no direct link to the Wuhan animal market and could have been infected in November by undetected cases from the animal market*"[xxxviii]. Therefore, if cases do not fit the WHO's interpretation of a zoonosis originating in the Wuhan market, China does not report them. This is a huge statistical error. The WHO requires its members (including China) to report any information of international significance within 24 hours (Art. 6) and to provide all information relevant to public health (Art. 7). However, as early as 30 December 2019, doctors in Wuhan were warning of an ongoing epidemic. Dr Li Wenliang was one of the Chinese whistleblowers. He died a few weeks later from COVID. Before his death, he had been arrested for reporting the cases observed in his hospital[xxxix]. Journalist Zhang Zhan said that "*without the truth, nothing makes sense*"[xl]. She was imprisoned for four years. So there were other whistleblowers in China besides Li Wenliang.

On 30 December 2019, at 3:10 p.m., the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission issued an '*urgent notice*' to healthcare facilities to monitor cases of "*pneumonia of unknown origin*". Then, at 6:50 p.m., a second notice was issued, warning "*not to disclose information to the public without authorisation*"[xli]. It was not until 31 December 2019 that China reported the Wuhan outbreak to the WHO[xlii], without providing the genome or mode of transmission[xliii].

On 1 January 2020, the Wuhan animal market was closed, but the outbreak continued. On 3 January, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) banned scientists from sharing information about SARS-CoV2. On 5 January, Zhang Yongzhen, a virologist at the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Centre (SPHCC), published the SARS-CoV2 virus sequence on a website in the United States, but with an embargo until July 2020. On 7 January, he submitted an article commenting on this sequence (without noticing the furin site). Under pressure, he disobeyed the CCP and the Chinese state and finally shared the genome with a co-author, who made it immediately available on a British website on 11 January[xliv]. He claimed that he had not been informed of the CCP's ban on sharing it. As late as 14 January, the WHO assured (based on Chinese information) that there was no evidence that the virus was transmitted from human to human. However, on 20 January, China acknowledged human-to-human transmission and ordered a lockdown of the population of the largest cities from 24 January. Zhang Yongzhen received a "*rectification*" from the government prohibiting him from working on this virus[xlv]. On 28 April 2020, he found the door to his laboratory closed by the Chinese state. He then fought to regain his position.

The viruses found in the first infected individuals have very little genetic diversity[xlvi]. It is therefore more likely that there was a single emergence of the virus, rather than an entire population of viruses that co-evolved naturally with humans (zoonotic theory)[xlvii]. Indeed, a zoonosis implies several passages back and forth from animals to humans, which generates a certain genetic diversity before any passage from animal to human, allowing for high transmissibility between humans.

Meanwhile, on 19 February 2020, the medical journal *The Lancet* published a letter signed by 27 prominent scientists in which the authors (including Daszak) stated: "*We stand together to strongly condemn conspiracy theories suggesting that COVID-19 does not have a natural origin.*" and "*Scientists from multiple countries [...] overwhelmingly conclude that this coronavirus originated in wildlife, [...]. Conspiracy theories do nothing but create fear, rumours, and prejudice that jeopardise our global collaboration in the fight against this virus*" and declare "*no conflict of interest*"[xlviii]. Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of *The Lancet*, acknowledged that "*Peter Daszak should certainly have declared his conflicts of interest from the outset*"[xlix]. In addition to his own funding, Daszak was funding the co-signatories of this letter, who were therefore indebted to him.

From 14 January to 10 February 2021, the WHO sent a team to China to investigate the origin of SARS-CoV2. This required the agreement of China, which also demanded that certain participants, including P. Daszak, be included. The mission was to "*identify the zoonotic source of the virus*"[l] (sic). Half of the researchers, who were Chinese nationals, had access to Chinese data[li]. The other half only could discuss the Chinese reports on these data. The WHO study concluded that zoonosis was "*likely to very likely*" and a laboratory incident "*extremely unlikely*"[lii]. Similarly, the conclusion of the mission leader (Peter Embarek) is that "*the hypothesis of a laboratory incident is extremely unlikely to explain the introduction of the virus*"[liii]. Less convinced, the Director-General of the WHO "*called for further studies to be conducted*"[liv]. Scientists[lv] also voiced strong criticism. Similarly, the United States, along with 13 other countries[lvi], as well as the European Union[lvii], have stated that greater clarity and transparency are necessary and feasible in order to move forward. In contrast, the spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has taken refuge behind the scientific conclusion of this expert committee[lviii]. Journalists note that "*the evidence points to bats as the likely reservoir animal.*"[lix]

In this second part, we have provided numerous details on the history of the COVID-19 pandemic and several possible explanations. The errors and falsehoods of various parties are evident. In the third part, we will therefore address the question of the origin of SARS-CoV2 and the positions of the various parties.

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