

**On Fri, Feb 14, 2020 at 3:41 PM McNeil Jr, Donald G <> wrote:**

Thanks very much. Enjoy that singles bar. (no, I know...)

**On Fri, Feb 14, 2020 at 3:39 PM Kristian G. Andersen <> wrote:**

Hi Don,

Just caught a single bar here in the middle of the Mojave...

As to your question - it's impossible to rule out everything here. There's nothing to suggest a bio weapon (somebody would have used SARS or MERS - not a novel bat virus). As for lab escape, as I mentioned in my previous email, that scenario would likely look like natural selection, so it's impossible to assess at this stage. What I can say is that the data is fully consistent with natural selection with bats being the ultimate reservoir. Again though, a lab escape might look much the same.

For your last sentence - for pangolins I'd say "possibly", not "probably". The "99% identical" CoV sequence(s) from pangolins has not been released and it's possible those numbers were overstated. While the currently available pangolin CoV sequences are close to nCoV (SARS-CoV-2), the RaTG13 CoV from bats is still closer. So too early to say at this stage what an intermediate host could have been.

Best,

Kristian

**On Fri, Feb 14, 2020 at 11:36 McNeil Jr, Donald G <> wrote:**

Hi, Kristian:

My story is about to run but, despite lots of reporting, I'm having to argue with colleagues/editors who are still wondering if the rumors that this was a bioweapon or a lab escape are possibly true.

Is it accurate to use this comparison?

"The rumor has circulated for years that the AIDS virus was created in Fort Detrick, MD. But virologists who look at the phylogeny of HIV say it is absolutely indisputable that it jumped out of African chimpanzees, not out of a lab. And they're making the same judgment about this one -- it fits the profile of a virus that has evolved in bats and other mammals, probably pangolins."

Thanks, Donald

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**Donald G. McNeil Jr.**

**Science Correspondent**