

# Don't buy China's story: The coronavirus may have leaked from a lab

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At an emergency meeting in Beijing held last Friday, Chinese leader Xi Jinping spoke about the need to contain the coronavirus and set up a system to prevent similar epidemics in the future.

A national system to control biosecurity risks must be put in place “to protect the people’s health,” Xi said, because lab safety is a “national security” issue.

Xi didn’t actually admit that the coronavirus now devastating large swaths of China had escaped from one of the country’s bioresearch labs. But the very next day, evidence emerged suggesting that this is exactly what happened, as the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology released a new directive titled: “Instructions on strengthening biosecurity management in microbiology labs that handle advanced viruses like the novel coronavirus.”

Read that again. It sure sounds like China has a problem keeping dangerous pathogens in test tubes where they belong, doesn’t it? And just how many “microbiology labs” are there in China that handle “advanced viruses like the novel coronavirus”?

It turns out that in all of China, there is only one. And this one is located in the Chinese city of Wuhan that just happens to be ... the epicenter of the epidemic.

That's right. China's only Level 4 microbiology lab that is equipped to handle deadly coronaviruses, called the National Biosafety Laboratory, is part of the Wuhan Institute of Virology.



A member of a medical staff checks the temperature of a patient who has displayed mild symptoms of the coronavirus.

AFP via Getty Images

What's more, the People's Liberation Army's top expert in biological warfare, a Maj. Gen. Chen Wei, was dispatched to Wuhan at the end of January to help with the effort to contain the outbreak.

According to the PLA Daily, Chen has been researching coronaviruses since the SARS outbreak of 2003, as well as Ebola and anthrax. This would not be her first trip to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, either, since it is one of only two bioweapons research labs in all of China.

Does that suggest to you that the novel coronavirus, now known as SARS-CoV-2, may have escaped from that very lab, and that Chen's job is to try to put the genie back in the bottle, as it were? It does to me.

Add to this China's history of similar incidents. Even the deadly SARS virus has escaped — twice — from the Beijing lab where it was (and probably is) being used in experiments. Both “man-made” epidemics were quickly contained, but neither would have happened at all if proper safety precautions had been taken.

And then there is this little-known fact: Some Chinese researchers are in the habit of selling their laboratory animals to street vendors after they have finished experimenting on them.

You heard me right.

Instead of properly disposing of infected animals by cremation, as the law requires, they sell them on the side to make a little extra cash. Or, in some cases, a lot of extra cash. One Beijing researcher, now in jail, made a million dollars selling his monkeys and rats on the live animal market, where they eventually wound up in someone's stomach.



Members of a police sanitation team spray disinfectant as a preventive measure against the spread of the coronavirus.

AFP via Getty Images

Also fueling suspicions about SARS-CoV-2's origins is the series of increasingly lame excuses offered by the Chinese authorities as people began to sicken and die.

They first blamed a seafood market not far from the Institute of Virology, even though the first documented cases of Covid-19 (the illness caused by SARS-CoV-2) involved people who had never set foot there. Then they pointed to snakes, bats and even a cute little scaly anteater called a pangolin as the source of the virus.

I don't buy any of this. It turns out that snakes don't carry coronaviruses and that bats aren't sold at a seafood market. Neither, for that matter, are pangolins, an endangered species valued for their scales as much as for their meat.

The evidence points to SARS-CoV-2 research being carried out at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The virus may have been carried out of the lab by an infected worker or crossed over into humans when they unknowingly dined on a lab animal. Whatever the vector, Beijing authorities are now clearly scrambling to correct the serious problems with the way their labs handle deadly pathogens.

China has unleashed a plague on its own people. It's too early to say how many in China and other countries will ultimately die for the failures of their country's state-run microbiology labs, but the human cost will be high.

But not to worry. Xi has assured us that he is controlling biosecurity risks "to protect the people's health." PLA bioweapons experts are in charge.

I doubt the Chinese people will find that very reassuring. Neither should we.

*Steven W. Mosher is the president of the Population Research Institute and the author of "Bully of Asia: Why China's 'Dream' Is the New Threat to World Order."*