

# Coronavirus: Pangolins may have spread the disease to humans

There are many questions about the novel Coronavirus that remain unanswered, such as “how does the virus spread?” and “where did it originate?” Now, Chinese-based researchers say they think the pangolin — a scaly, otherwise harmless mammal that eats ants — may have spread the virus to humans.



Researchers point to the pangolin as a potential carrier of the novel coronavirus.

Indeed, a [paper](#) published in February 2022 concluded that “horseshoe bats, *Rhinolophus*, are

the likely reservoir species for the SARS-CoV-2.”

However, bats are unlikely to transmit the virus directly to humans, so, as with most similar viruses — such as SARS and MERS — an intermediary animal is usually the one responsible. For SARS, this was the civet cat, while dromedaries helped spread MERS.

When contacted by *MNT* a few days ago, The World Health Organization (WHO) said they did not yet know the specific source of the novel coronavirus.

“Researchers in China are studying this but have not yet identified a source,” they said at the time.

Only a few days later, researchers Shen Yongyi and Xiao Lihua of South China Agricultural University in Guangzhou announced in a press conference that they might have identified the pangolin as the source of the virus.

The announcement, “Pangolin is found as a potential intermediate host of new coronavirus in South China,” can be found on the university’s [website](#).

## A 99% DNA match

Researchers had shown previously that the new coronavirus is most similar to two other bat viruses; in fact, its genomic similarity to these viruses is 88%, which led scientists to believe that bats carried the new virus.

**Now, the two researchers used genomic sequencing to compare the DNA of the new coronavirus in humans with that in animals and found a 99% match with pangolins.**

“This is an extremely interesting observation. Although we need to see more details, it does make sense as there are now some other data emerging that pangolins carry viruses that are closely related to 2019-nCoV,” Edward Holmes, an evolutionary virologist at the University of Sydney, Australia, told the prestigious journal [Nature](#).

**“This latest discovery will be of great significance for the prevention and control of the origin of the new coronavirus,” the Chinese university website states.**

Liu Yahong, president of the South China Agricultural University, announced at the conference that they would publish the findings soon to help control the virus.

## How could pangolins have spread the virus?

[Pangolins](#) — a relative of the armadillo and anteaters — are scaly mammals that feed on burrowing insects, such as termites and ants.

Pangolins are also an endangered [species](#), and previous research has shown that the coronavirus is likely responsible for killing a large number of Malayan Pangolins.