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SNS Subscriber Edition

Special Alert

Monday, February 24th, 2020

*****SNS SPECIAL ALERT*****

WHY THE WUHAN CORONAVIRUS COULD EASILY BE MANMADE

“We must not inadvertently slip into the same condition internally as the one which we fight externally. Like Abraham Lincoln, I am a firm believer in the people, and, if given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crises. The great point is to bring before them the real facts.”
– General Douglas McArthur^[1]

SNS Global Report readers are already hearing much, both in this publication and in many others, about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, etc.) outbreak. While many reports have captured part of the story, there’s no piece to date that explains in detail exactly what we will cover below.

In this Special Alert, my aim is to be brief, avoid conjecture, and simply present first, what we know, and second, the questions that arise from that knowledge - or, what we need to know.

What We Know

In regards to the novel coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, we know that:

1. The Chinese government manipulates domestic data for many reasons, at many levels, if it serves its purposes, including in the fields of economics^[2], housing^[3], transportation^[4], finance^[5], industrial growth^[6], and many more.
2. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) knows this, and does not believe that the coronavirus data being released by Beijing is accurate.^[7]
3. The Chinese government delayed access to the country by outside WHO and CDC teams for no stated reason.^[8]

4. The novel coronavirus is genomically most similar to previously sequenced bat coronaviruses, excepting that “although 2019-nCoV was closer to bat-SL-CoVZC45 and bat-SL-CoVZXC21 at the whole-genome level, the receptor-binding domain of 2019-nCoV fell within lineage B and was closer to that of SARS-CoV.”^[9] Further, the S1 region of COVID-19 is more similar to the original SARS-CoV in that “previous studies have uncovered several receptors that different coronaviruses bind to, such as ACE2 for SARS-CoV and CD26 for MERS-CoV [...] molecular modelling showed structural similarity between the receptor-binding domains of SARS-CoV and 2019-nCoV.”^[10]
5. Viruses to date require the ability to access a receptor in order to replicate in people (making a zoonotic “jump”), and for bat coronaviruses the barrier they cannot normally broach is the ACE-2 receptor, which can allow a zoonotic shift if there is a change in viral surface glycoprotein in Spike S1.^[11]
6. The creation of the Wuhan BSL-4 biolab, the only lab of its level in China, drew concern at its outset^[12], particularly given Beijing’s history of accidentally releasing SARS from the lab.^[13]
7. The NIH stopped funding for gain-of-function studies in 2014^[14], given the danger, before lifting the pause in 2017^[15] and publishing guidelines that highlight the importance of avoiding the creation of a dangerous pathogen – as it could be directly misapplied to pose a significant threat with broad potential consequences to public health and safety, agricultural crops and other plants, animals, the environment, materiel, or national security.^[16]
8. One gain-of-function project that was already underway was a collaboration between University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill researchers Ralph Baric and Vineet Menachery and a group of 15 researchers from various other institutions, including Zhengli-Li and Xing-Yi Ge of the Key Laboratory of Special Pathogens and Biosafety at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, with Zhengli-Li providing “spike sequences and plasmids” and Xing-Yi Ge performing “pseudotyping experiments.”^[17] Further, these researchers “generated and characterized a chimeric virus expressing the spike of bat coronavirus SHC014 in a mouse adapted SARS-CoV backbone. The results indicate that group 2b viruses encoding the SHC014 spike in a wild type backbone can efficiently utilize multiple ACE2 receptor orthologs, replicate efficiently in primary human airway cells, and achieve *in vitro* titers equivalent to epidemic strains of SARS-CoV.”^[18]
9. Researchers working at the same laboratory in Wuhan have worked actively on bat coronaviruses from Yunnan for some time.^[19]
10. The first clinical cases of the virus occurred before the Huanan wet market outbreak^[20], and “the virus came into that marketplace before it came out of that marketplace.”^[21]

What We Need to Know

Given the facts above, it is clear that the hypothesis provided by the Chinese government (PRC) on the origin of the COVID-19 outbreak being the Huanan Seafood Market isn't accurate. Further, the closest genomic cousin to the current virus seems to have been taken from bats in Yunnan brought to the Wuhan BSL-4 lab.

That lab is known to have worked with American researchers to engineer coronaviruses that can spread quickly in human respiratory tissue by editing the S1 spike protein site to mirror SARS-CoV and affect the ACE-2 inhibitor - which is what COVID-19 does. With no known source, and with the above information, one cannot rule out the possibility that the virus came from the Wuhan BSL-4 Lab, just as SARS escaped Beijing labs multiple times.

If the above is true, the next most important questions would be:

1. Was the pathogen released accidentally from the lab? If so, how can this be avoided in the future, and who should be held accountable?
2. Could the pathogen have been released intentionally? If so, why and by whom?
3. What are the chances that it did not originate from the lab? Disease mapping of early cases, data transparency, and more genomic studies should be required, as well as full disclosure of studies taking place in the lab, if the PRC government wants to assuage concerns that this may be a manufactured pathogen.

Without further evidence, it would be foolish to propose that the above questions, which the facts laid out in this work reinforce as legitimate enquiry, were statements of certainty. They remain questions; but not because the contingency they outline is impossible. Indeed, it is *probable*, given the nature of the work taking place at the BSL-4 Lab.

If the PRC government insists that any concerns regarding manufactured pathogens are nonsense, it must back up those bold claims with transparent data, granting the WHO and the CDC full access, and it must cease any further obstructionism in the investigation.

In fact, counter to the assertions of Chinese media^[22], understanding how the pandemic began is critical, particularly if there is even a remote possibility that its origin is a manmade agent. If that is the case, the virus's characteristics and behavior are significantly different than a "wild type" of viral genome, and preparations around the world should reflect that.

All of the information available to date suggests that the Chinese government is

withholding information. And all of the information presented here suggests that it is likely that COVID-19 came from the BSL-4 Lab at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

If so, how it was released, and why, will be of paramount importance. Global health and the global economy depend upon the answers.

[1] https://archive.org/stream/timecapsule0onewy/timecapsule0onewy_djvu.txt

[2] <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3015206/chinas-economic-census-undercovers-more-fake-data-officials>

[3] <https://qz.com/530096/china-data-tricks/>

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/real-news-on-fake-data-in-china-1515573859>

[7] <https://www.ccn.com/official-coronavirus-cases-near-50000-but-the-cdc-isnt-buying-it/>

[8] <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/07/health/cdc-coronavirus-china.html>

[9] [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30251-8/fulltext#seccesstitle170](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30251-8/fulltext#seccesstitle170)

[10] Ibid.

[11] <https://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.3000217>

[12] <https://www.nature.com/news/inside-the-chinese-lab-poised-to-study-world-s-most-dangerous-pathogens-1.21487>

[13] <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/304/5671/659.full>

[14] <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/statements/statement-funding-pause-certain-types-gain-function-research>

[15] <https://osp.od.nih.gov/2017/12/19/nih-lifts-funding-pause-gain-function-research/>

[16] <https://www.phe.gov/s3/dualuse/Pages/default.aspx>

[17] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4797993/>

[18] Ibid.

[19] <https://nationalpost.com/news/world/cave-full-of-bats-in-china-identified-as-source-of-virus-almost-identical-to-the-one-killing-hundreds-today>

[20] [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30183-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30183-5/fulltext)

[21] <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/01/wuhan-seafood-market-may-not-be-source-novel-virus-spreading-globally>

[22] <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3051917/who-coronavirus-team-ground-zero-wuhan-work-out-next-containment>