

International surveillance system for zoonotic pandemics needs greater attention

May 27 2020, by Andrew Merrington



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An expert in international relations has questioned whether more could have been done to combat the threat of zoonotic illnesses—those caused by germs that are spread between animals and people.

Dr. Lorenzo Cladi, of the School of Law, Criminology and Government, says the repeated emergence of zoonoses in the past 40 years—most

recently with COVID-19 (currently thought to have originated from a combination of bat and pangolin coronaviruses)—demonstrates that the world is failing to heed the warnings and lessons of the past.

Writing for the Jandoli Institute of St. Bonaventure University (NY), Dr. Cladi and regular academic collaborator Professor Stephen Green, a [medical doctor](#) working in Sheffield who has an interest in the politics of healthcare, initially made the case for pooling our "ingenuity, energy and resources to deal with this pandemic."

The pair have now elaborated upon this call in an article in the *Journal of Infection*, where they have warned that a concerted and coordinated effort is required, bringing together professional, medical, veterinary, agricultural and scientific commitment, with political support and genuine inter-governmental cooperation.

"Since 1980 we have seen, among others, HIV-1, HIV-2, new variant Creutzfeld-Jacob Disease, [avian influenza](#), swine influenza, SARS-1, Nipah virus, Sin Nombre virus, monkey pox, and MERS-CoV all emerge out of [animal populations](#) and cause serious and even lethal human disease," say Dr. Cladi and Professor Green.

"COVID-19 arguably has already had more serious implications than all of its predecessors, with 270,333 deaths recorded worldwide at the time of writing, but what comes after it may be even worse!"

Cladi and Green point to a major report in 2012 by the Department for International Development (DFID) that concluded the importance of early detection and identification in controlling infection and disease. The World Health Organisation fulfills some of this remit, but has, they say, suffered from inadequate levels of funding for the very broad remit it has to cover—quoting from a *British Medical Journal* rapid response of

theirs, "It has been said that the organization has '194 masters, and those 194 masters don't necessarily have the same agenda,' and it has forever been hamstrung by chronic under-funding."

Only expert lobbying at the highest levels of politics and [international relations](#), they contest, is likely to address the situation—although with the impact of COVID-19 still being felt, the political climate may now well be right for such an undertaking.

In their *Journal of Infection* [paper](#), Dr. Cladi and Professor Green conclude:

"The massive worldwide medical and economic impacts of COVID-19 make it abundantly clear that the DFID report was correct, and what is badly needed is an efficient and effective worldwide integrated surveillance system for zoonotic disease which has the capability to identify the emergence of any serious new pathogens in human or animal populations anywhere in the world, and the power to act on the information, as early as is humanly possible and unimpeded by international borders."

Unpreparedness may no longer be an option for the future, they say, in the light of the fact that the world has been hit by COVID-19, a global, lethal pandemic that currently appears to have originated from a combination of animal sources. The pair noted in another piece, which appeared in the *British Medical Journal*, that "In 2020 nearly 70% of the world's countries were unprepared to respond to public health threats." Regardless of whether over-reaction is better than under-reaction, they say, to simply wait and watch may not be the way forward to generate a greater sense of security among populations and governments.

More information: Stephen T. Green et al. High time for an efficient and effective internationally-supported Zoonosis Surveillance System?,

Journal of Infection (2020). DOI: [10.1016/j.jinf.2020.05.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jinf.2020.05.015)

Stephen T Green et al. Cassandra's curse and covid-19: why do governments listen to businesses over doctors?, *BMJ* (2020). DOI: [10.1136/bmj.m1852](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m1852)

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