

Europe was central in the global spread of the coronavirus, says new research

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The University of Huddersfield's Archaeogenetics Research Group has mapped out the dispersal of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, responsible for the current worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, putting Europe center-stage as the main source of the spread.

The group's findings, recently published by the journal *Microorganisms*,

confirm that the [virus](#) originated in China and most likely jumped into humans from horseshoe bats. But it is Europe, not China, which has been the main source for spreading the disease around the world.

Travel restrictions across Britain and Europe seem to have been too little and too late, and most of the spread of the virus to America and other parts of the world was via Europe, not directly from China.

The study focused on 27,000 virus genomes, sampled from all around the world. The researchers usually work on tracking ancient human migrations using mitochondrial DNA, and they capitalized on the fact that the virus genome is similar in crucial respects.

Still, the mammoth size of the database—even back in May, when the study began—makes this one of the biggest analyses of its kind ever undertaken.

The intensive data analyses were carried out by clinical geneticist Dr. Teresa Rito and evolutionary geneticist Dr. Pedro Soares at the University of Minho, in Portugal. They have both worked closely with Huddersfield for many years and drew on their colleagues Professor Martin Richards and Dr. Maria Pala from the University's Archaeogenetics Research Group to help make sense of the data and publish their conclusions in double-quick time.

There is a huge ongoing worldwide effort to understand the spread of the virus, and researchers are trying to make their work available to the public as fast as possible.

As the world continues to face a rapidly spreading pathogen, a greater understanding of the virus can better inform and improve upon policies designed to control the spread. Dr. Pala commented: "With thousands of lives still at risk, scientific research is more crucial than ever."

More information: Teresa Rito et al. Phylogeography of 27,000 SARS-CoV-2 Genomes: Europe as the Major Source of the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Microorganisms* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/microorganisms8111678](https://doi.org/10.3390/microorganisms8111678)

Provided by University of Huddersfield

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