

# WHO team visits animal disease center in Wuhan, China

February 2 2021

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Members of a World Health Organization team are seen wearing protective gear during a field visit to the Hubei Animal Disease Control and Prevention Center for another day of field visit in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. The WHO team is investigating the origins of the coronavirus pandemic has visited two disease control centers in the province. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

A World Health Organization team of international experts visited an animal disease center in the Chinese city of Wuhan on Tuesday as part of their investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic.

Team member Peter Daszak, a zoologist with the EcoHealth Alliance, said "excellent facilities, very informative meeting" from an open window as the group left the center in minivans.

He also tweeted that they had met with staff in charge of livestock health in Hubei province, toured laboratories and had an in-depth discussion along with questions and answers. Wuhan is the capital of Hubei.

Further details of the visit were not announced in what has been a tightly controlled trip, with the media only able to glimpse the team coming and going from its hotel and site visits.

The team members wore full protective gear during Tuesday's visit.

It's not clear if they wore similar full-body suits at the research institutes, hospitals and markets they visited on previous days. Outside their hotel and en route to and from visits, the experts have worn masks and professional or business casual attire.

Intense negotiations preceded the WHO visit to Wuhan, where the first COVID-19 cases were detected in late 2019. China has maintained strict controls on access to information about the virus, possibly to avoid blame for alleged missteps in its early response to the outbreak.





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Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the Chinese government had provided significant support and assistance to the WHO team, responding to criticism that China has not revealed much about what the researchers are being allowed to do.

"The Chinese experts have shared a lot of information and research results with the WHO team, and they had several rounds of in-depth

exchanges on scientific issues of common concern," he said.

On Monday, WHO officials in Geneva pushed back against suggestions China is being less than forthcoming about how the pandemic started.

Dr. Michael Ryan, the WHO emergencies chief, dismissed critics who said any report from the mission would be incomplete. The team "deserves the support of the international community," he said.

The data the team assembles will add to what is expected to be a years-long quest for answers involving taking animal samples, genetic analysis and epidemiological studies.



Peter Daszak, left, points to Peter Ben Embarek, right, before they leave the hotel with other members of a World Health Organization team for another day



of field visit in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. The WHO team is investigating the origins of the coronavirus pandemic has visited two disease control centers in the province. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)



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Peter Daszak, left, bumps fists with Peter Ben Embarek before they leave the hotel with other members of a World Health Organization team for another day of field visit in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. The WHO team is investigating the origins of the coronavirus pandemic has visited two disease control centers in the province. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)





Peter Daszak, left, clasps hands with Peter Ben Embarek before they leave the hotel with other members of a World Health Organization team for another day of field visit in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province on Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. The WHO team is investigating the origins of the coronavirus pandemic has visited two disease control centers in the province. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)



Peter Ben Embarek, right, gestures as Peter Daszak, left, approaches to bump fists with him before they leave the hotel with other members of a World Health Organization team for another day of field visit in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. The WHO team is investigating the origins of the coronavirus pandemic has visited two disease control centers in the province. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)





Peter Daszak, left, reaches out to shake hands with Peter Ben Embarek, right, before they leave the hotel with other members of a World Health Organization team for another day of field visit in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. The WHO team is investigating the origins of the coronavirus pandemic has visited two disease control centers in the province. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)



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Peter Ben Embarek of a World Health Organization team leaves in a car after a visit to the Hubei Animal Disease Control and Prevention Center in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. The WHO team is investigating the origins of the coronavirus pandemic has visited two disease control centers in the province. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)



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China has largely stopped domestic transmission of the virus through sometimes draconian measures, including strict testing and electronic surveillance. Mask wearing in public is standard and lockdowns are routinely imposed on communities and even entire cities where cases are detected.

Schools have gone online and travel has been drastically cut during this month's Lunar New Year holiday, with the government offering

incentives for people to stay put in the cities rather than return to their home towns for family gatherings.

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