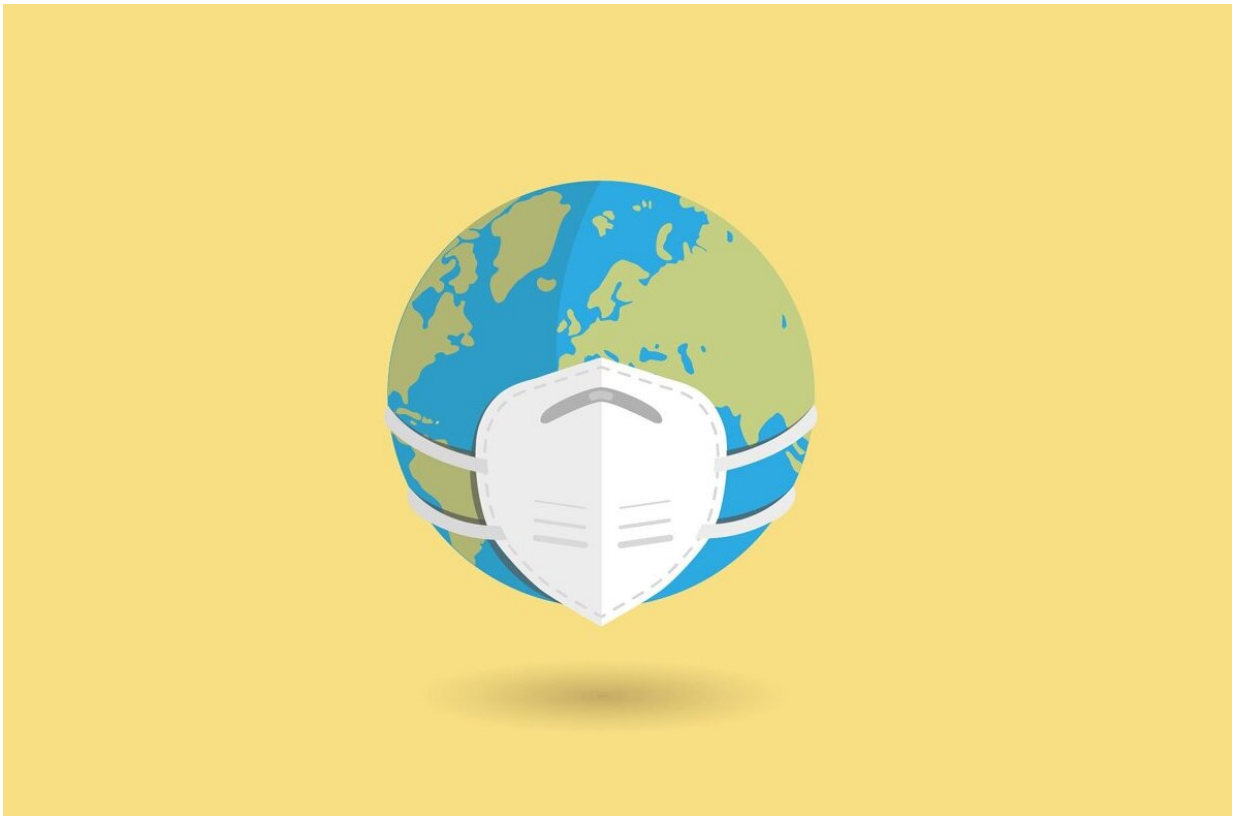


WHO urges countries to come clean on Covid origins intel

March 3 2023



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The WHO on Friday urged all countries to reveal what they know about the origins of COVID-19, following US claims of a Chinese lab leak and furious denials from Beijing.

FBI director Christopher Wray told Fox News television on Tuesday that the US Federal Bureau of Investigation had now assessed the source of COVID-19 [pandemic](#) was "most likely a potential lab incident in Wuhan".

The first infections with the new coronavirus were recorded in late 2019 in the Chinese city, which hosts a virus research laboratory.

Chinese officials have angrily denied the FBI claim, calling it a smear campaign against Beijing.

"If any country has information about the origins of the pandemic, it's essential for that information to be shared with WHO and the international scientific community," said the World Health Organization's director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"Not so as to apportion blame but to advance our understanding of how this pandemic started so we can prevent, prepare for and respond to future epidemics and pandemics.

"WHO has not abandoned any plans to identify the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic," he told reporters.

WHO urges transparency

In 2021, the UN's health agency set up the Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens (SAGO) to look into the origins of the pandemic.

"WHO continues to call for China to be transparent in sharing data and to conduct the necessary investigations and share the results," said Tedros, adding that he had written and spoken to top Chinese leaders on multiple occasions.

"Until then, all hypotheses on the origins of the virus remain on the table."

But he added that politicisation of the origins research was making the scientific work harder—and the world less safe as a result.

The comments from FBI chief Wray came after a report earlier this week said the US Department of Energy had determined that a Chinese lab leak was the most likely cause of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The department works with a network of national laboratories, including some involved in advanced biological research. Other agencies within the US intelligence community believe the virus emerged naturally.

Share the data, says WHO

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's COVID-19 technical lead, said the WHO had reached out to the US mission in Geneva for more information.

So far, however, they did not have access to the data on which the US reports were based, said Van Kerkhove, who is an infectious disease epidemiologist.

"It remains vital that that information is shared", to help move the scientific studies forward, she added.

Tedros said there was a moral imperative to find out how the pandemic started, for the sake of the millions who lost their lives to COVID-19 and those living with long COVID.

More than 6.8 million COVID-19 deaths and more than 758 million confirmed cases have been reported to the WHO, which acknowledges

that the true toll is far higher.

© 2023 AFP

Citation: WHO urges countries to come clean on Covid origins intel (2023, March 3) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-03-urges-countries-covid-intel.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.