

'We need to know': WHO says China has more on COVID origin

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The World Health Organization said Thursday it was sure China had far more data that could shed light on the origins of COVID, demanding Beijing immediately share all relevant information.

"Without full access to the information that China has... all [hypotheses](#) are on the table," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in Geneva.

"That's why we have been asking China to be cooperative on this," he said, insisting that if Beijing does provide the [missing data](#) "we will know what happened or how it started".

More than three years after COVID-19 first surfaced, heated debate still rages around the origins of the pandemic.

The issue has proved divisive for the [scientific community](#) and even different US government agencies, which are split between a theory that the [virus](#) jumped naturally to humans from animals and one maintaining that the virus likely leaked from a Wuhan laboratory—a claim China has angrily denied.

Late last month, new evidence emerged that raccoon dogs, known to be able to carry and transmit viruses similar to the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID, were at a market in Wuhan when the disease was first detected in humans.

The researchers who unexpectedly stumbled over the [genetic data](#) say that it supports—but cannot definitively prove—the theory that the virus originated in animals, possibly first jumping over to humans at the market.

Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead on COVID-19, told journalists Thursday that the new information provided "clues", but no clear answers, insisting that the [data](#) "collected in January and February 2020, more than three years ago" should have been shared long ago.

"Without information, without data to make a proper assessment, it's

very difficult for us to give a concrete answer. And in the present time, we don't have a concrete answer of how the pandemic began," she said. —'Not a game'—

But she voiced certainty that China's "incredible scientists" had conducted far more studies and collected much more data that could be relevant in the search.

"We know there is more information that's out there," she said.

"We need scientists, public health professionals and governments to share this information. This is not a game."

In an editorial in Science magazine published Thursday, Van Kerkhove said she believed China had data that it had not shared including on the wild and farmed animal trade at the Wuhan market, the testing of humans and animals in Wuhan and across China, and operations of labs in Wuhan working on coronaviruses.

"Lab audit data exist and have not been shared, for example," she wrote, demanding that China share all data on the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID "immediately".

Tedros stressed the vital importance of getting to the bottom of the mystery, pointing out that determining COVID origins could help avert future pandemics.

And with nearly seven million deaths officially registered in the pandemic—with the real toll believed to be several times higher—he said there was a "moral imperative".

"We need to know the answer, beyond reasonable doubt."

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