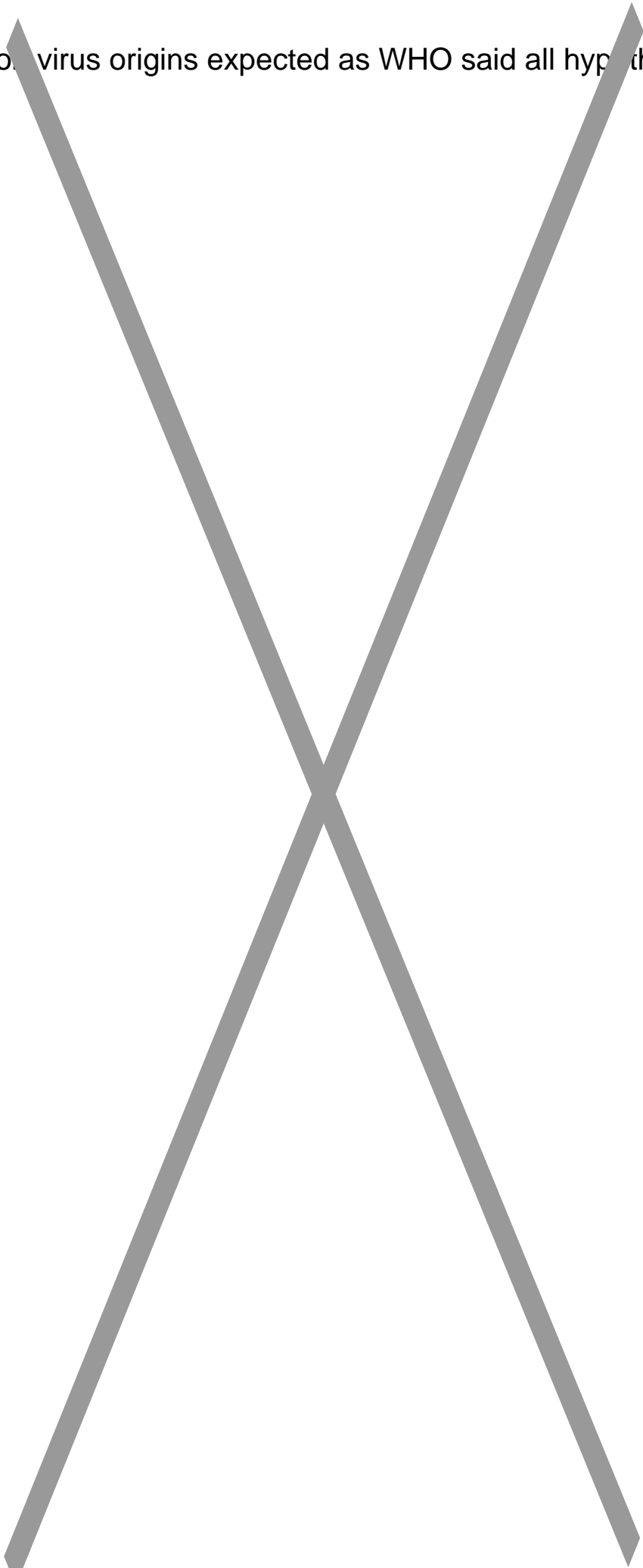


Wider probe of virus origins expected as WHO said all hypotheses are open

**Description**

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Health Organization (WHO) team, investigating the origins of the coronavirus, visit the closed Huanan Seafood wholesale market in Wuhan, Central China's Hubei Province. Photo: AFP

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, head of the World Health Organization, said at a briefing on Friday that the summary findings of the mission team would be released soon in next week, with the full version of the report coming in the following weeks.

"Some questions have been raised as to whether some hypotheses have been discarded. Having spoken with some members of the team, I wish to confirm that all hypotheses remain open and require further analysis and study," Tedros said. He said the team just concluded a "very important scientific exercise in very difficult circumstances."

The WHO team has probed into four primary hypotheses over the virus sources, including direct transmission from animal-to-human, virus jumping to human through an intermediate host, frozen food route-related transmission and lab-related transmission, said Peter Ben Embarek, who leads the WHO team.

The mission has said its main hypotheses are that the virus originated in a bat, although there are several possible scenarios for how it passed to humans, possibly first by infecting another species of animal, media reported. Embarek claimed further surveys are needed, not only in China, to see if there are other types of animals to be reservoirs of the virus. The team has also identified vendors selling frozen animal products, some of which were imported products, in the Wuhan Huanan market, but it has not released any detailed conclusion on how the virus reached the seafood market, according to the WHO on Tuesday. Transmissions of coronavirus occurred elsewhere in the world along with the Wuhan Huanan seafood market in late 2019.

Those hypotheses existed also in some other countries which have revealed evidence of coronavirus cases earlier than the outbreak in Wuhan, Wang Guangfa, a respiratory expert at Peking University First Hospital, told when [the Global Times](#).

From the current investigation, it is unlikely that the coronavirus was homegrown in China. It is most likely that it was brought in from other countries by way of travelers or other means. WHO experts should look to Spain, Brazil and Italy for clues to cases reported earlier, Wang suggested.

Chinese netizens have suggested that some other countries like the US look back to detect the novel coronavirus on the influenza patients, as many have been doubting if the COVID-19 cases have been mixed among respiratory illnesses which have similar symptoms, including a mysterious e-cigarette-caused lung disease, in the US without being tested out.

Chinese experts suggested that some other biological labs in other places, such as US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick, cannot be ruled out in the hypothesis on the virus source, as it has raised doubts the possible link between the institute and a series of deadly disease outbreaks, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has caused more than 481,000 deaths in the US.

Netizens also appealed for more investigations on mutant strains detected in the UK or other places to probe possible connection with the virus sources.

"The initial findings suggest the lab incident was extremely unlikely to introduce the virus into the

human population,” Embarek said on Friday.

It also completely refutes the conspiracy theory raised by some anti-China hawks, like former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo and former US president Donald Trump, who has been accusing the Wuhan Institute of Virology of leaking the virus.

“It’s of course always possible that the virus is and was present in samples that have not yet been processed, or among viruses that have not yet been characterized,” Embarek said.

“But knowingly, apparently from all the labs we’ve talked with, nobody has seen this virus before,” whereas the scientists discovering new viruses would publish the findings immediately in the most common practice.

“Some of that work may lie outside the remit and scope of this mission. We have always said that this mission would not find all the answers, but it has added important information that takes us closer to understanding the origins of the virus,” Tedros said.

“Virus traceability investigation is a scientific issue. The investigation organized by WHO is not targeting any country, nor can it be preconceived. Even if a country is found to be the source country, it should not be blamed or become a tool for political attacks,” Wang stressed.