

**NEWS**

Wuhan scientists wanted to release coronaviruses into bats

By **Emily Crane**

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Chinese scientists wanted to genetically engineer coronaviruses that were more infectious to humans and then conduct experiments on live bats about 18 months before the first COVID-19 cases emerged — but a US Department of Defence agency rejected the funding proposal, leaked documents reveal.

Scientists at the Wuhan Institute of Virology were planning to genetically enhance airborne coronaviruses and release aerosols containing “novel chimeric spike proteins” among cave bats in Yunnan, China, according to the 2018 proposal submitted to the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

They also planned to alter coronaviruses to infect humans more easily by introducing “human-specific cleavage sites” to bat coronaviruses.



A team of researchers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology and the EcoHealth Alliance work on bats they have captured to sample them for coronaviruses.

ECOHEALTH ALLIANCE

The proposal was spearheaded by New York City-based EcoHealth Alliance — the nonprofit headed by British scientist Peter Daszak that has previously funneled federal funds to the Wuhan lab for bat coronavirus research.

But the \$14 million grant ended up being rejected by DARPA over fears it could result in gain-of-function research, which could make a virus more transmissible and pathogenic.

“It is clear that the proposed project led by Peter Daszak could have put local communities at risk,” DARPA said in rejecting the proposal.



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ECOHEALTH ALLIANCE

Details of the leaked proposal were released Tuesday by [Drastic Research](#), a group of international scientists investigating the origins of the pandemic.

Drastic said it was provided the papers by a whistleblower, and a former member of the Trump administration confirmed the proposal’s authenticity to [the Telegraph](#).

The group questioned whether the research — particularly altering the virus to make it more infectious to humans — still went ahead given the theory that COVID-19 spread from the Wuhan lab.

“Given that we find in this proposal a discussion of the planned introduction of human-specific cleavage sites, a review by the wider scientific community of the plausibility of artificial insertion is warranted,” Drastic said.

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GOP lawmakers call for Pelosi to subpoena Fauci on COVID-19 origin



It comes one week after a group of GOP lawmakers called for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to subpoena Dr. Anthony Fauci on the origins of COVID-19.

In a letter sent to Pelosi on Sept. 14, they said they have unsuccessfully attempted to seek information from multiple officials about the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases funding that they believe may have been used for gain-of-function research. Fauci is NIAID's director.

The group argued that the information was critical for providing oversight and gaining information to prevent future pandemics, noting that the intelligence community's report on the deadly virus' origin was inconclusive.

Fauci was earlier accused by critics of lying after separate documents appeared to contradict his claims that the National Institutes of Health did not fund gain-of-function research at the same Wuhan lab. NIAID is part of the NIH.

The documents, obtained by the Intercept, detailed other grants given to EcoHealth Alliance.



Drastic Research said that looking into the plausibility of the lab-leak theory is “warranted.”

HECTOR RETAMAL/AFP via Getty Images

Fauci has repeatedly insisted that NIH funding of the Wuhan lab does not constitute gain-of-function research.

The grant proposal included in the documents was for a project titled “Understanding the Risk of Bat Coronavirus Emergence,” which involved screening thousands of bat samples, as well as people who worked with live animals, for novel coronaviruses, the outlet said.

The \$3.1 million grant was awarded for a five-year period between 2014 and 2019. After the funding was renewed in 2019, it was suspended by the Trump administration in April 2020.

The grant directed \$599,000 to the Wuhan Institute of Virology for bat coronavirus research.

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