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US funded research to create 'mutant viruses' at Wuhan lab ahead of COVID-19, records show



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Fred Lucas

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The EcoHealth Alliance used U.S. tax dollars to research "mutant viruses" during its work with the [Wuhan lab in China](#), according to federal grant applications.



Judicial Watch, a conservative watchdog group, obtained [552 pages](#) from the National Institutes of Health through the Freedom of Information Act about grants to the EcoHealth Alliance that included information for research the group did at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

A June 5, 2013, grant application from EcoHealth to the NIH explains its plans to use bat coronavirus to create a mutant virus, according to one document in the release.

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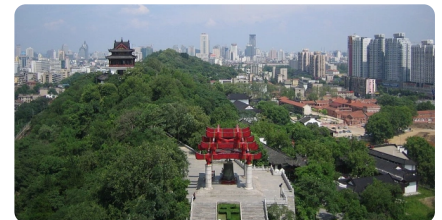


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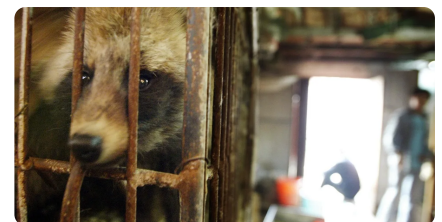


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A researcher works in a lab in Wuhan, China, on Oct. 12, 2021.

"With bat-CoVs that we've isolated or sequenced and using live virus or pseudovirus infection in cells of different origin or expressing different receptor molecules, we will assess potential for each isolated virus and those with receptor binding site sequence, to spill over," the grant application explained. "We will do this by sequencing the spike (or other receptor binding/fusion) protein genes from all our bat-CoVs, creating mutants to identify how significantly each would need to evolve to use ACE2, CD26/DPP4 (MERS-CoV receptor) or other potential CoV receptors."

This research, the EcoHealth grant application says, would "allow us to determine critical receptor binding sites, viral host range, and to better predict the capacity of our CoVs to infect people."

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The information included the initial grant application and annual reports to the NIH with information on progress, effectiveness and how the funding would be used going forward.

The NIH provided millions in grants from 2013 through 2018 to EcoHealth Alliance. Some of this funding came during the Obama administration-imposed three-year ban on gain-of-function research. The documents do not specify gain of function and EcoHealth denies conducting gain-of-function research.

But critics have said the NIH found end-runs around the funding pause even if the research didn't meet the finite definition.



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emergence of the COVID pandemic in Wuhan," said Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton in a public statement. "This gain-of-function scandal should be the subject of criminal investigations."

[ANOTHER US AGENCY ASSESSES COVID-19 ORIGIN LIKELY A CHINESE 'LAB LEAK': REPORT](#)

An EcoHealth Alliance spokesperson told Fox News Digital in an email response, "EcoHealth Alliance did not support gain-of-function research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Any assertions to the contrary are based either on misinterpretation or willful misrepresentation of the actual research conducted."

"Because the SARS-related research conducted by EcoHealth Alliance and the Wuhan Institute of Virology dealt with bat coronaviruses that had never been shown to infect people, let alone cause significant morbidity and/or mortality in humans, by definition it was not gain-of-function research," the EcoHealth Alliance spokesperson continued.



The EcoHealth Alliance used U.S. tax dollars to research "mutant viruses" during its work with the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China, according to federal grant applications.

The statement added, "The bat coronavirus research conducted by EcoHealth Alliance, and the Wuhan Institute of Virology could not have started the COVID-19 pandemic."

EcoHealth Alliance also refers to an [October 2021 comment](#) by then-NIH Director Francis Collins, who said, "Analysis of published genomic data and other documents from the grantee demonstrate that the naturally occurring bat coronaviruses studied under the NIH grant are genetically far



The 2013 application obtained through the Judicial Watch public records request goes on to explain "specific aims" of the research.

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"To understand the risk of zoonotic CoV [coronavirus] emergence, we propose to examine 1) the transmission dynamics of bat-CoVs across the human-wildlife interface; and 2) how this process is affected by CoV evolutionary potential, and how it might force CoV evolution. We will assess the nature and frequency of contact among animals and people in two critical human-animal interfaces: live animal markets in China and people who are highly exposed to bats in rural China," the application says.

Three [Biden administration agencies](#) – the Energy Department, FBI and Office of the Director of National Intelligence – have determined that COVID-19 likely emerged from a lab leak in China. However, this hasn't been connected directly to any U.S. funding.

The NIH awarded a \$3.3 million grant to EcoHealth to run from October 2013 through September 2018 for a projected titled "Understanding the Risk of Coronavirus Emergence." The project's first "Project/Performance Site Location" was the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The project also included the East China Normal University in Shanghai, Yunnan Institute of Endemic Disease Control and Prevention in Dali, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention of Guangdong in Guangzhou.

On May 27, 2014, the NIH awarded EcoHealth a [separate grant](#) of \$3 million over five years for "Understanding the Risk of Bat Coronavirus Emergence."

The experiments used "humanized mice," meaning mice injected with human cells.



A World Health Organization team investigating the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic arrive at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Wuhan, China, on Feb. 3, 2021.

"We request support for in vitro infection experiments using pseudoviruses carrying the spike proteins (wild type or mutants) or live viruses in cell lines of different origins, binding affinity assays between the spike proteins (wild types or mutants) and different cellular receptor molecules, and humanized mouse experiments," the grant application says.

The documents also show that EcoHealth CEO Peter Daszak and Wuhan lab director Shi Zhengli [briefed their findings](#) to both U.S. and China government agencies that included the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the National Natural Science Foundation of China, the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

NIH never approved any research that would make a coronavirus more dangerous to humans, an agency spokesperson said.

"The research we supported in China, where coronaviruses are prevalent, sought to understand the behavior of coronaviruses circulating in bats that have the potential to cause widespread disease," an NIH told Fox News Digital. "Importantly, because of NIH-funded research to understand coronaviruses, the U.S. was able to move swiftly to develop vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 and save lives."

The NIH spokesperson continued, "The administration also continues to work with partners around the world to press China to fully share information and to cooperate with international investigations to get to the bottom of the origins of COVID-19, a priority for this administration."



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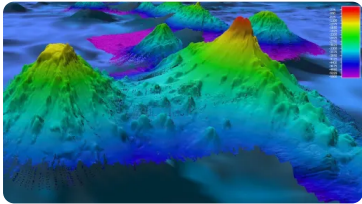


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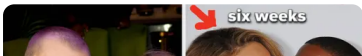


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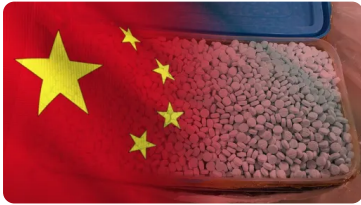


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