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COVID-19 Could Stem From Risky Experiments at Chinese Lab: Fauci

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COVID-19 could have been the result of risky experiments at a laboratory in China, Dr. Anthony Fauci acknowledged in an interview over the weekend.

“A lab leak could be that someone was out in the wild maybe looking for different types of viruses in bats, got infected, went into a lab, and was being studied in a lab, and then came out of the lab,” said Fauci, the former director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). “The other possibility is someone takes a virus from the environment that doesn’t actually spread very well in humans, and manipulates it a bit, and accidentally it escapes or accidentally infects someone and then you get an outbreak.”

The first COVID-19 cases were detected in 2019 in Wuhan, China, where a high-level laboratory is located. Scientists at the lab were funded in part by the NIAID.

Fauci, speaking [on CNN](#), claimed that he’s “kept an open mind” as to the origin of COVID-19. However, he was [involved](#) in a paper that alleged in early 2020 that said SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, was “not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus,” and cited the paper from the White House when

asserting the virus had a natural origin.

While a number of experts told Fauci privately around that time that characteristics of the virus pointed to it being engineered, evidence that later emerged strongly suggested a natural origin, including [two](#) 2022 [papers](#) in Science magazine, Fauci said on March 11.

“But strongly suggesting, Jim, doesn’t nail it down definitively, and that’s the reason why I say to this day that I will keep a completely open mind as to what the origin is,” Fauci said.

Neither Fauci nor other natural origin theory proponents have identified an animal host, which is necessary to establish their position.

Chinese authorities, meanwhile, have blocked investigators from the Wuhan lab, which was cut off from U.S. funding after not sharing data with U.S. officials.

Some U.S. intelligence agencies say the current evidence supports the origin being a laboratory-associated incident, while others are in favor of the natural origin theory.

While lab accidents have occurred in the past, no lab leaks have led to pandemics, Fauci said.

“There have been accidents in a lab, that happens intermittently—we’ve had experience with that in modern times—but there has never been a situation where a virus escaped from a lab, that’s a brand new virus—that no one has ever seen before—that’s led to a pandemic,” he said. “That’s never happened.”

CNN did not ask Fauci about a newly published email that said he “prompted” the drafting of the 2020 paper.

Fauci was speaking after Dr. Robert Redfield, the former head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told a congressional panel that the evidence points to the Wuhan lab.

Redfield cited how the Wuhan lab deleted sequences, how the lab was under military control, and how a contractor redid the ventilation system there.

“There is strong evidence there was a significant event in that laboratory in September 2019,” he said.

Reaction to Calls for Prosecution

On CNN, Fauci also reacted to calls to prosecute him over false statements he’s made.

“There’s no response to that craziness,” Fauci said.

“I mean, prosecute me for what? What are they talking about? I mean, I wish I could figure out what the heck they were talking about. I think they’re just going off the deep end,” he added.

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) has referred Fauci for prosecution for telling members of Congress that the United States did not fund gain-of-function research in China despite documents [being made public](#) that experts say show that U.S.-funded experiments led to a gain of function in a bat coronavirus.

The U.S. Department of Justice has not charged Fauci, who left office around the New Year.

Twitter CEO Elon Musk is among others who have called for the prosecution of Fauci, while Republican lawmakers, now in control of the U.S. House of Representatives, have vowed to investigate him.

Such statements have “a difficult effect and a deleterious effect on my family,” Fauci said. “I mean, they don’t like to have me getting death threats all the time. Every time somebody gets up and spouts some nonsense, that’s misinformation, disinformation, and outright lies, somebody somewhere decides they want to do harm to me

and/or my family. So that's the part about it that is really
unfortunate.”