

Against the reckless risk-taking of a next pandemic

We must not accept the risks of gain-of-function research

by Roland Wiesendanger,* Germany

(CH-S) Roland Wiesendanger is a professor of physics at the University of Hamburg and a member of numerous national and international science academies, including the “Leopoldina” and “acatech”. In the following article, he suggests – as he did four years ago – a public debate on the so-called “gain-of-function” research. Switzerland must not shirk this debate either.

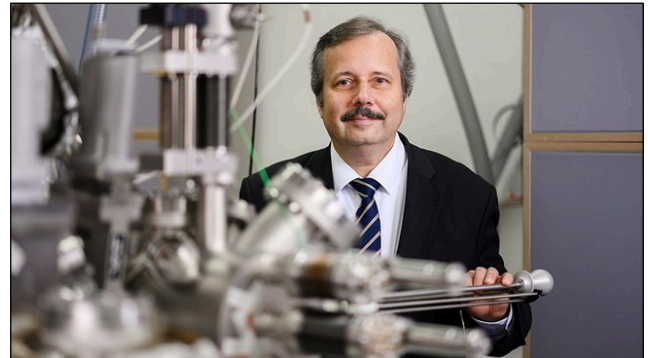
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The question of the origin of the coronavirus pandemic is crucial. Only when we know the answer adequate precautions can be taken to minimise the likelihood of similar pandemics occurring in the future.

Exactly four years ago, my study on the origin of the coronavirus pandemic was *made public*¹ nationally and internationally in a press release by the University of Hamburg. As can be seen from this press release, after a year of research into all relevant publications, documents and witness interviews, I concluded that both the number and the quality of the circumstantial evidence point to a laboratory accident at the Virological Institute in Wuhan as the cause of the *current pandemic*.²

Public debate is urgently needed

My intention was – as can be seen from the title of the press release – to stimulate a “broad discussion”, particularly with regard to the ethical



Prof. Dr. Roland Wiesendanger (Picture Sebastian Engels)

aspects of so-called “gain-of-function” research, which makes pathogens more contagious, dangerous and deadly to humans. The University of Hamburg’s press release stated: “This can no longer be the concern of a small group of scientists but must urgently become the subject of public debate.”

Despite the overwhelmingly positive response from the public, who in most cases only became aware of the highly problematic gain-of-function research with pandemic-capable pathogens as a result of my study, and the great approval among colleagues at the University of Hamburg, public perception was marked by a storm of indignation from the mainstream media: There was talk of spreading a “conspiracy theory”, of “hokum” and of “anti-Asian racism”.

US government

now officially speaks of laboratory origin

A few days ago, on 31 January 2025, it was announced from the podium of the White House in the USA that the pandemic originated in a laboratory in Wuhan (“we now know that to be the confirmable truth”). This unequivocal statement is based on numerous abnormalities in the genetic makeup of SARS-CoV-2 that do not occur in naturally occurring Sars viruses, as well as on intelligence information.

While these virological and intelligence findings are not new to insiders, they have not been communicated to the public in such a clear form by a government.

* Roland Wiesendanger, born 1961, is a professor of physics at the University of Hamburg and holds an honorary doctorate from the Technical University of Poznan. He is a member of numerous national and international science academies, including the two national academies “Leopoldina” and “acatech” and a fellow of several international science organisations. Wiesendanger is known and connected worldwide through over six hundred scientific publications and over six hundred scientific lectures in various scientific fields. The German virologist *Christian Drosten* took legal action against Wiesendanger after the latter had claimed that Drosten had “deliberately deceived” the public regarding the origin of the pandemic virus.

What does this mean in concrete terms? It means that high-risk virological research, carried out in Wuhan by a consortium of Chinese and US scientists, and co-financed by US taxpayers, has led to a global catastrophe with millions of deaths and economic damage in the trillions.

Fauci: Research is worth the risk of a global pandemic

The controversial discussion about the problematic gain-of-function research with pandemic-capable pathogens reached a preliminary peak in 2011/12, when two research groups demonstrated for the first time in the laboratory the easy transmission of bird flu pathogens via aerosols to mammals – and ultimately to humans. The simple skipping of the natural barrier when transferring from one species (poultry) to another (mammals) was only made possible by genetic manipulation in the laboratory.

While numerous responsible scientists condemned this highly dangerous virological research as immoral and unethical, some representatives of research organisations and numerous virologists who wanted to continue such experiments in the hope of gaining knowledge defended this line of research.

In a 2012 interview, *Anthony Fauci*, the long-standing health advisor to numerous US presidents and head of a subdivision of the US *National Institutes of Health* (NIH), argued that the knowledge gained from gain-of-function research would be worth the risk of a global pandemic.

In an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 18 February 2012, the German virologist *Christian Drosten*, together with two co-authors, stated that “we have to endure the risks”.

USA shifted controversial research abroad

From today’s perspective, the fact that individual scientists at the time already presumed to speak in the “we” form when dealing with the risk to the lives of millions of people is outrageous – after the painful loss of relatives, acquaintances, friends and fellow citizens. This becomes even clearer when one considers that in 2012, scientists estimated that there was an 80 per cent probability of a global pandemic caused by gain-of-function research within ten years.

The fierce debate led to a situation in which gain-of-function research in the USA no longer received any government funding from 2014 to 2017. However, Anthony Fauci increasingly shifted

this virological research, which came in for fierce criticism, abroad, including also to Wuhan in China.

In 2015, further highly problematic gain-of-function experiments were published with corona hybrid viruses that had been adapted to human cell receptors and consequently showed a “pandemic potential” for humans. *Simon Wain-Hobson*, a well-known virologist at the *Pasteur Institute* in Paris, pointed out at the time that the US and Chinese researchers had created a novel virus that “grows remarkably well” in human cells. “If the virus escaped, no one could predict how it would spread.”

State-funded but not supervised

Despite all the warnings, this highly dangerous research, which was also insanely funded by many countries – not only the US but also Germany – continued unabated under the aspect of “pandemic preparedness”.

In 2017, Anthony Fauci predicted a *surprise outbreak*³ of a pathogen. I will not go into the contradiction between predicting an outbreak and labelling it as “surprise” here. In any case, it must have been clear to everyone involved – including the virologists involved – that they were literally playing with fire in the name of fire prevention.

Increasingly daring plans

Freed from any state supervision, the virological experiments became increasingly daring. For example, a research proposal from 2018 with the short title “DEFUSE” became known, which contained a kind of construction manual for artificially creating a virus type like SARS-CoV-2.

In addition to the responsible project manager, who is also the president of a US non-governmental organisation that has been channeling US tax dollars for high-risk virological research abroad for many years, US researchers from the *University of North Carolina* and scientists from the *Wuhan Institute of Virology* were also involved in this research proposal. Although this was initially rejected by DARPA, a sub-organisation of the US Pentagon, this research was ultimately funded by Anthony Fauci’s department.

The international community was not informed for months

The scientists decided to carry out the research in Wuhan because the safety standards there

were lower than in the USA. This was even though the problem of the low safety standards at the Wuhan Institute of Virology had been communicated to the US government in Washington a year earlier by US diplomats on the ground in Wuhan. In the summer of 2019, the corona pandemic broke out because of scientists being infected in Wuhan, with the international community being kept uninformed for months.

As we know today, intelligence information about the outbreak of a novel pathogen in Wuhan was already available in autumn 2019, and by early 2020, numerous virologists worldwide, including three Nobel Prize winners in virology, had already recognised that the genetic sequence of the new SARS-CoV-2 virus showed clear indications of a non-natural origin.

Cover-up by scientists

However, in a cover-up unprecedented in the history of science, the laboratory origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus was denied and the fairy tale of the Wuhan seafood market as the origin of the pandemic was invented and is still being told to some extent today. This is all the more reprehensible given that as early as May 2020, the director of the Chinese CDC (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*) had stated that, according to a thorough examination of numerous samples taken from this fish market, this market could not be the cause of the pandemic, but only played a significant role in the rapid spread of the SARS-CoV-2 pathogen.

What necessary conclusions can be drawn from the laboratory origin of the Covid-19 pandemic, as confirmed by the US government? First, there must be an urgent and comprehensive inventory of global gain-of-function research activities involving pathogens that could cause a pandemic. In the US alone, over 60 of these are suspected. In Wuhan, high-risk experiments *with dangerous Nipah viruses are also continuing*,⁴ which have been classified by the US Centers for

Disease Control as bioterrorist agents and have the potential to wipe out a significant portion of the world's population if they are easily made transmissible to humans, as in the case of the SARS virus.

Contrary to the Biological Weapons Convention

Much of the global gain-of-function research with pandemic-capable pathogens is carried out under the guise of basic research that is interested purely in gaining knowledge. In some countries, it is recognised that this is "dual use" research, which not only serves to gain fundamental knowledge but can also be used for military purposes. However, all these research activities are fundamentally contrary to the international *Biological Weapons Convention* of the 1970s and violate the moral and ethical standards of a responsible world community.

Therefore, I would like to once again – as I did four years ago – suggest a public debate on how to proceed with the highly dangerous "gain-of-function" research with pandemic-capable pathogens. At the same time, I would like to remind you of our *Hamburg Declaration of February 2022*⁵ to globally ban and end this research, which is incompatible with moral and ethical principles and values.

Source: <https://www.infosperber.ch/wissenschaft/der-pandemieursprung-und-seine-notwendigen-konsequenzen/>, 21 February 2025

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

¹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349302406_Studie_zum_Ursprung_der_Coronavirus-Pandemie

² <https://www.uni-hamburg.de/newsroom/presse/2021/pm8.html>

³ <https://www.healio.com/news/infectious-disease/20170111/fauci-no-doubt-trump-will-face-surprise-infectious-disease-outbreak>

⁴ <https://arxiv.org/abs/2109.09112>

⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358769312_HAMBURG_DECLARATION_2022_Call_for_a_Global_End_to_High-Risk_Gain-of-Function_Research_on_Potential_Pandemic_Pathogens