

Why COVID-19 won't be our last pandemic: We've created a 'perfect storm' for wildlife disease spillover

[Researchers] have now developed a pattern-recognition system to predict which wildlife diseases pose most risk to humans.

[Editor's note: Health experts warn that we've created 'a perfect storm' for animal diseases to make the jump to humans.]

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"In the last 20 years, we've had six significant threats – SARS, MERS, Ebola, avian influenza and swine flu," Prof Matthew Baylis from the University of Liverpool told BBC News. "We dodged five bullets but the sixth got us."

"And this is not the last pandemic we are going to face, so we need to be looking more closely at wildlife disease."

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Across the thousands of bacteria, parasites and viruses known to science, this system identifies clues buried in the number and type of species they infect. It uses those clues to highlight which ones pose most of a threat to humans.

If a pathogen is flagged as a priority, scientists say they could direct research efforts into finding preventions or treatments before any outbreak happens.

"It will be another step altogether to find out which diseases could cause a pandemic, but we're making progress with this first step," Prof Baylis said.

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