

## ‘Window rapidly closing for scientists to evaluate COVID-19 origins’, says international Wuhan investigation team

The search for the origins of SARS-CoV-2 is at a critical juncture. There is willingness to move forward from both the WHO international team and the Chinese team.

Crucially, the window is rapidly closing on the biological feasibility of conducting the critical trace-back of people and animals inside and outside China. SARS-CoV-2 antibodies wane, so collecting further samples and testing people who might have been exposed before December 2019 will yield diminishing returns.

Chinese wildlife farms employ millions of people (14 million, according to a [2016 census](#)) and supplied live mammals to cities across China, [including Wuhan](#). In response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, many of these farms are now closed and the animals have been culled, making any evidence of early coronavirus spillover increasingly difficult to find.

In July, four months after the full report and five months after our debriefing, the WHO informed member states of plans to create a committee that will oversee future origins studies.

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However, applying this new process to the continuing SARS-CoV-2 origins mission runs the risk of adding several months of delay.

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Therefore, we call on the scientific community and country leaders to join forces to expedite the phase 2 studies detailed here, while there is still time.

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