

COVID origins report postponed, likely due next week: WHO

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An international expert team that visited China to investigate the origins of COVID-19 has postponed publishing their report, which will now likely appear next week, the WHO said Tuesday.

"The report is simply not ready," World Health Organization spokesman

Christian Lindmeier told reporters.

"What we hear from the [technical experts](#), from the mission members, is that the report most likely will come out now next week," he added.

The highly-anticipated report is expected to examine a range of theories about how the virus first jumped from animals to humans, which the experts looked into during their four-week mission to Wuhan—the city where the first COVID-19 cases were identified.

Experts believe that the new [coronavirus](#) that causes COVID-19 originally came from bats, and crossed into humans via an intermediate animal, but remain unsure on when and how that happened.

During a lengthy press conference in Wuhan on February 9 at the end of the mission, the experts and their Chinese counterparts made clear that they could not yet draw any firm conclusions.

But the world has been eagerly anticipating the report ever since for more insight into how the experts ranked a number of hypotheses, including theories about wild animal meat brought to Wuhan from southern China, one about a lab accident and another about the virus being imported in frozen food.

Repeated delays

The team had initially planned to quickly publish a [preliminary report](#), but that plan was shelved in February without a clear explanation.

Then WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced at the beginning of March that the full report would be published sometime this week, promising to give member states an advance peek at the conclusions.

The repeated delays have sparked renewed criticism of the UN health body's slow response to a demand by its member states last May for an independent, international team to assist Chinese experts in probing the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It took months to select the 10 international experts, including epidemiologists and animal health specialists, and diplomatic wrangling with China delayed the mission further.

In the end, they arrived in Wuhan more than a year after the first cases of SARS-CoV-2—the virus that causes COVID-19 disease—were first discovered there, in December 2019.

Since then, nearly 2.7 million people have died worldwide and the [global economy](#) lies in tatters.

Lindmeier said Tuesday that the team of experts, who are drafting the report with their Chinese counterparts, were still finalising the document.

"The experts are drawing it up together, and... the more people involved, the more people will have to have a say in it," he said.

"They want to get it right. That is the important part."

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