

NIH Cancels Funding for Bat Coronavirus Research Project

The abrupt termination comes after the research drew President Trump's attention for its ties to the Wuhan Institute of Virology.



Shawna Williams

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Update (August 28): STAT reports that the NIH has awarded EcoHealth Alliance new funding as part of a grant to a network of institutions and research teams that will “work to determine how and where viruses and other new pathogens emerge from nature to begin infecting people.”

ABOVE: The canceled grant included money for surveillance of coronaviruses in Yunnan, China.
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Update (August 19): According to a Wall Street Journal report and a statement by EcoHealth Alliance, NIH reversed its termination of the grant but suspended funding until EcoHealth meets new requirements, including arranging an inspection of the Wuhan Institute of Virology by an outside team. “NIH’s letter does not represent a good faith effort to understand the nature of our ongoing research,” EcoHealth says in its statement, but “imposes on us a series of demands that the NIH is fully aware many governments and the World Health Organization alike have been unable to successfully satisfy.”

Update (May 26): Last week, 77 Nobel laureates and 31 scientific societies separately sent letters to NIH Director Francis Collins criticizing the decision to terminate the grant and urging that it be reviewed, Science reports.

A grant to a New York nonprofit aimed at detecting and preventing future outbreaks of coronaviruses from bats has been canceled by the National Institutes of Health, *Politico* reports, apparently at the direction of President Donald Trump because the research involved the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China. The virology institute has become a focal point for the idea that SARS-CoV-2 escaped from the laboratory and caused the current COVID-19 pandemic, a scenario experts say is not supported by evidence. Instead, virologists *The Scientist* has spoken to say the virus most likely jumped from infected animals to humans.

The grant, first awarded in fiscal year 2014 and most recently renewed last year, went to [EcoHealth Alliance](#), which describes itself as “a global environmental health nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting wildlife and public health from the emergence of disease.” The [aims](#) of the funded project included characterizing coronaviruses present in bat populations in southern China and conducting surveillance to detect spillover events of such viruses to people. The project has resulted in [20 publications](#), most recently a [March report](#) on zoonotic risk factors in rural southern China.

See “Where Coronaviruses Come From”

EcoHealth Alliance’s partners on the project include researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a BSL-4 facility that has for months been a focus of conspiracy theories that SARS-CoV-2 escaped or was released from a lab. On April 14, the *The Washington Post* published a column highlighting State Department cables about concerns regard-

safety at the institute. (Experts tell [NPR](#) that, even in light of the cables, accidental escape of the virus from a lab remains a far less likely scenario than a jump from animals.)

Then, in an April 17 White House coronavirus [briefing](#), a reporter, whom *Politico* identifies as being from *Newsmax* falsely stated in a question that “US intelligence is saying this week that the coronavirus likely came from a level 4 in Wuhan,” and that the NIH had awarded a \$3.7 million grant to the Wuhan lab. “Why would the US give a grant that to China?” she asked. “We will end that grant very quickly,” Trump said in his answer.

See “[Theory that Coronavirus Escaped from a Lab Lacks Evidence](#)”

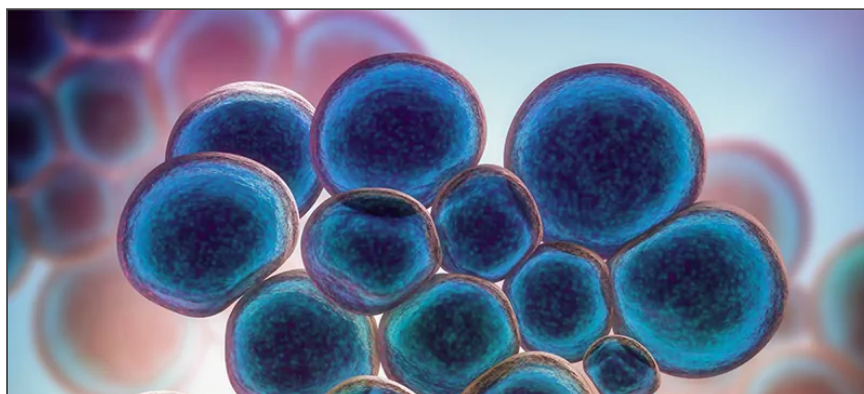
An NIH official then wrote to EcoHealth Alliance to inquire about money sent to “China-based participants in this work,” *Politico* reports, and the organization’s head, Peter Daszak, responded that a complete response would take time, but that “I can categorically state that no fund from [the grant] have been sent to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, nor has any contract been signed.” Days later, NIH notified EcoHealth Alliance that future funding for the project was canceled, and that it must immediately “stop spending the \$369,819 remaining from its 2020 grant”—unusual move generally reserved for cases of scientific misconduct or financial improprieties, according to *Politico*.

In a [statement](#) about the cancellation, EcoHealth Alliance says the terminated research “aimed to analyze the risk coronavirus emergence and help in designing vaccines and drugs to protect us from COVID-19 and other coronavirus threats,” and that it addresses “all four strategic research priorities of the NIH/NIAID [Strategic Plan for COVID-19 Research](#), released just this week.” The organization will, it says, “continue our fight against this and other emerging diseases.”

Keywords:

[bat](#), [bats](#), [China](#), [coronavirus](#), [COVID-19](#), [disease & medicine](#), [ecology](#), [ecology & environment](#), [microbiology](#), [NIAID](#), [NIH](#), [NIH funding](#), [NIH grants](#), [nutshell](#), [pandemic](#), [SARS](#), [SARS-CoV-2](#), [viral surveillance](#)

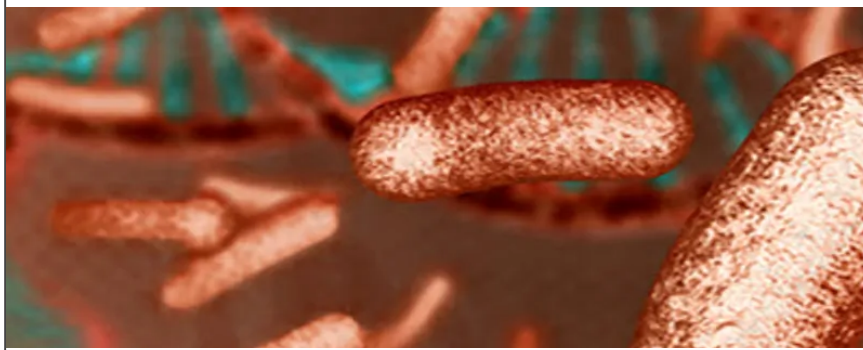
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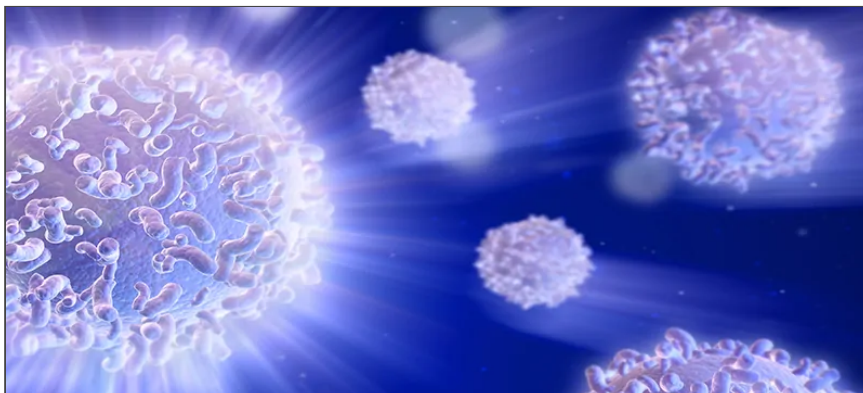
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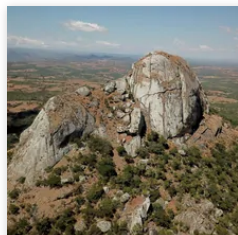
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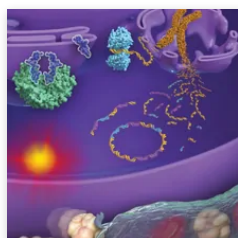


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