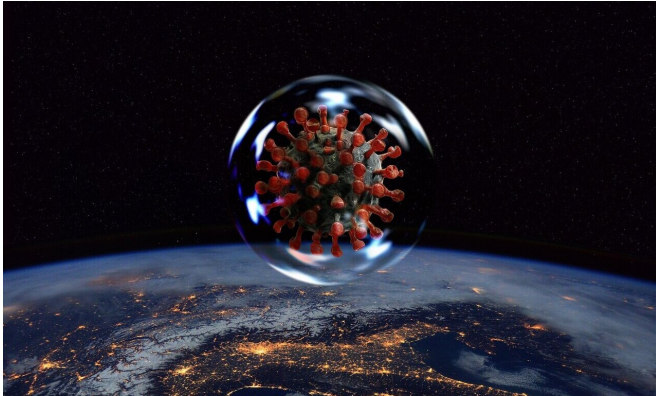


WHO chief urges deeper probe into COVID lab leak theory

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The World Health Organization chief called Tuesday for investigators looking into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic to delve deeper into a theory about a possible lab leak incident.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus welcomed a long-delayed report from an international mission tasked with probing how the virus that causes COVID-19 first jumped to humans, saying it "advances our understanding in important ways".

But in a briefing to member states, he stressed it also "raises further questions that will need to be addressed by further studies".

The report, compiled by WHO-appointed international experts and their Chinese counterparts, did not draw any firm conclusions, but did rank a range of hypotheses according to how likely they thought they were.

The report, seen by AFP ahead of its Tuesday publication, had judged a lab-leak hypothesis "extremely unlikely", saying the virus behind COVID-19 had most probably jumped from bats to humans via an intermediary animal.

But Tedros urged them to look deeper into the lab theory.

"Although the team has concluded that a laboratory leak is the least likely hypothesis, this requires further investigation, potentially with additional missions involving specialist experts, which I am ready to deploy," he said.

The WHO chief also voiced concern that the international [expert](#) team had "expressed the difficulties they encountered in accessing raw data" while in China.

"I expect future collaborative studies to include more timely and comprehensive data sharing," he said.

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