

Joint Statement: WHO-Convened COVID-19 Origins Study

Joint Statement on the WHO-Convened COVID-19 Origins Study.

The Governments of Australia, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America remain steadfast in our commitment to working with the World Health Organization (WHO), international experts who have a vital mission, and the global community to understand the origins of this pandemic in order to improve our collective global health security and response. Together, we support a transparent and independent analysis and evaluation, free from interference and undue influence, of the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, we join in expressing shared concerns regarding the recent WHO-convened study in China, while at the same time reinforcing the importance of working together toward the development and use of a swift, effective, transparent, science-based, and independent process for international evaluations of such outbreaks of unknown origin in the future.

The mission of the WHO is critical to advancing global health and health security, and we fully support its experts and staff and recognize their tireless work to bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic, including understanding how the pandemic started and spread. With such an important mandate, it is equally essential that we voice our shared concerns that the international expert study on the source of the SARS-CoV-2 virus was significantly delayed and lacked access to complete, original data and samples. Scientific missions like these should be able to do their work under conditions that produce independent and objective recommendations and findings. We share these concerns not only for the benefit of learning all we can about the origins of this pandemic, but also to lay a pathway to a timely, transparent, evidence-based process for the next phase of this study as well as for the next health crises.

We note the findings and recommendations, including the need for further studies of animals to find the means of introduction into humans, and urge momentum for expert-driven phase 2 studies. Going forward, there must now be a renewed commitment by WHO and all Member States to access, transparency, and timeliness. In a serious outbreak of an unknown pathogen with pandemic potential, a rapid, independent, expert-led, and unimpeded evaluation of the origins is critical to better prepare our people, our public health institutions, our industries, and our governments to respond successfully to such an outbreak and prevent future pandemics. It is critical for independent experts to have full access to all pertinent human, animal, and environmental data, research, and personnel involved in the early stages of the outbreak relevant to determining how this pandemic emerged. With all data in hand, the international community may independently assess COVID-19 origins, learn valuable lessons from this pandemic, and prevent future devastating consequences from outbreaks of disease.

We underscore the need for a robust, comprehensive, and expert-led mechanism for expeditiously investigating outbreaks of unknown origin that is conducted with full and open collaboration among all stakeholders and in accordance with the principles of transparency, respect for privacy, and scientific and research integrity. We will work collaboratively and with the WHO to strengthen capacity, improve global health security, and inspire public confidence and trust in the world's ability to detect, prepare for, and respond to future outbreaks.