

NEWS

China officials knew of coronavirus in December, ordered cover-up, report says

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Chinese scientists knew about the coronavirus and its deadly effects as early as December — but were ordered by government officials to suppress the evidence, according to a report.

In late December, several genomics companies tested samples from sick patients in Wuhan — the center of the coronavirus outbreak — and noticed alarming similarities between their illnesses and the 2002 SARS virus, the Sunday Times of London reported, citing Chinese business news site Caixin Global.

The researchers alerted Beijing of their findings — and on Jan. 3, received a gag order from China's National Health Commission, with instructions to destroy the samples.

Rather than hunkering down to contain the virus, Wuhan officials went ahead with their annual potluck dinner for 40,000 families.

The alleged cover-up continued when representatives from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Jan. 8 visited Wuhan, where officials intentionally withheld information that hospital workers had been infected by patients — a telltale sign of contagion.

News of the virus' highly contagious nature didn't [surface publicly until Jan. 20](#). Wuhan was locked down and a mass quarantine ordered three days later.

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