

《新发现：新冠病毒可能已经在人类中传播多年》

As COVID-19 has hitchhiked around the globe, causing lockdowns, pneumonia and fear, scientists have been racing to determine where the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus has come from.

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While we don't have all the answers yet - including whether it came from an animal reservoir - a new analysis has definitively put to rest the conspiracies that claim it's a lab-made disease.

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The study raises some interesting possibilities regarding the origin of the new coronavirus. One of the scenarios suggests the virus may have been circulating harmlessly in human populations for quite a while before it became the pandemic that's now stopped the world in its tracks.

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"It is possible that a progenitor of SARS-CoV-2 jumped into humans, acquiring [new genomic features] through adaptation during undetected human-to-human transmission," the team from the US, UK and Australia writes in the study.

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"once acquired, these adaptations would enable the pandemic to take off and produce a sufficiently large cluster of cases."

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The researchers analysed genomic data available from SARS-CoV-2 and other similar coronaviruses, showing that the receptor-binding domain (RBD) sections of SARS-CoV-2 spike proteins were so effective at binding to human cells, they had to be caused by natural selection.

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"By comparing the available genome sequence data for known coronavirus strains, we can firmly determine that SARS-CoV-2 originated through natural processes," said one of the researchers, immunologist Kristian Andersen at Scripps Research.

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