

Rubio: China will be ‘held accountable’ if coronavirus outbreak originated from Wuhan lab

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Sen. Marco Rubio said Thursday that China will be held accountable by the U.S. and the world if it's revealed the novel coronavirus originated in a Wuhan laboratory rather than a market.

The Florida Republican is referring to a theory, one of multiple, being pursued by American investigators that COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the virus, originated in a Wuhan laboratory, not as a bioweapon but as part of China's efforts to prove that its capabilities of identifying and combating viruses are equal to or greater than the capabilities of the U.S.

"If that is what happened, and we've got to wait and see if that is in fact what happened, there is no doubt that China will be held accountable not just by the United States but by the world," Rubio told FOX Business', Maria Bartiromo.

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Sources told Fox News they believe the initial transmission of the virus - a naturally occurring strain that was being studied there - was bat-to-human and that "patient zero" worked at the laboratory, then went into the population in Wuhan.

The sources emphasized - as is often the case with intelligence - that the theory is not definitive and should not be characterized as such.

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The Chinese government has been widely criticized for its initial response to the virus and is frequently attacked by President Trump. The central leadership has tried to shift blame to local authorities, including for censuring doctors who tried to warn the public about the disease, The New York Times reported. Health authorities in the country first learned about the outbreak after unknown whistle-blowers leaked two internal documents online.

China also excluded more than 1,500 people who were infected with the virus but haven't shown symptoms from its national tally of confirmed cases, according to a new Wall Street Journal report. Scientists don't have a consensus on the impact of asymptomatic cases.

A recent report, whose authors include an expert from Wuhan's Municipal Center for Disease Control and Prevention, found that if China had taken aggressive action just a week earlier in mid-January, the number of infections could have been reduced by two-thirds.

"China covered up essential facts about this and set the world back by days and weeks in terms of its response," Rubio said.

Fox News' Bret Baier and Gregg Re contributed to this report

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