

NEWS

Australian scientist who worked in Wuhan can't rule out COVID lab-leak theory

By Lee Brown

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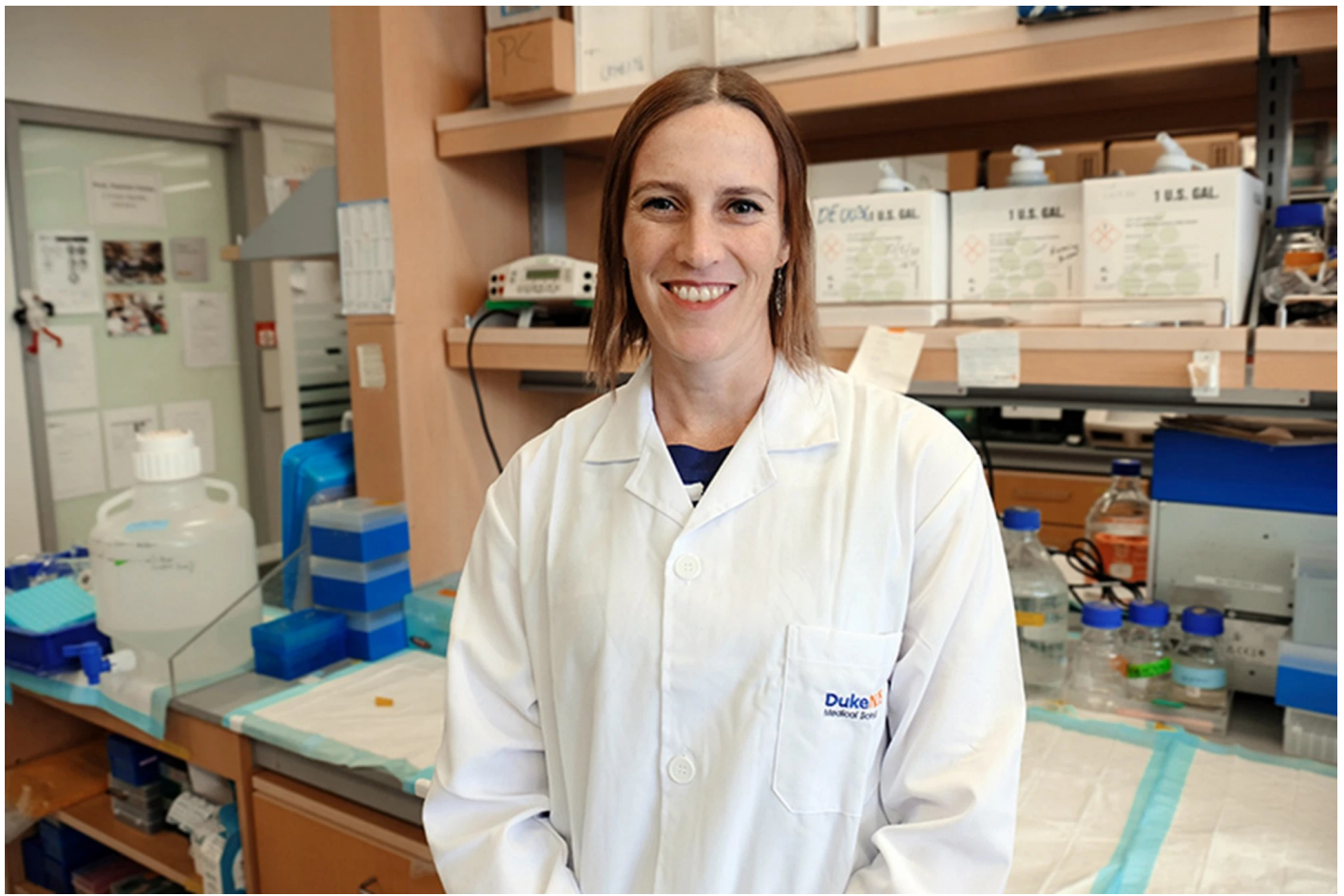
The only foreign scientist who worked at China's notorious Wuhan Institute of Virology has admitted she can't rule out that COVID-19 **leaked from the lab**.

"I'm not naive enough to say I absolutely write this off," Australian virologist Danielle Anderson **told Bloomberg** of the theory behind the pandemic that has so far **killed nearly 4 million people** worldwide.

Anderson, 42, was last at the institute in central China in November 2019, when the virus is believed to have already started **spreading in Wuhan**.

SARS, an earlier coronavirus that emerged in Asia in 2002 and killed more than 700 people, made its way out of at least four secure facilities, she **told the outlet**.

Largely because of that, Anderson said that she "could foresee how things could maybe happen."



Danielle Anderson says she isn't "naive enough" to absolutely write off the theory that the coronavirus leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Duke-NUS

However, the scientist, now based back home in Australia, told Bloomberg she is convinced the virus was not made intentionally to infect people or deliberately released.

She conceded it was possible for a scientist in the lab working on a [gain-of-function technique](#) to unknowingly infect themselves and then unintentionally spread it in the community — but she rated the likelihood as exceedingly slim.

Still, Anderson agreed that the possibility should be part of ongoing investigations into the pandemic's origins.



Virologist Danielle Anderson was the only foreign scientist who worked at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Overall, the Australian scientist praised the lab, which had top-level BSL-4 biological safety, for its “very, very extensive” protocols — which included 45 hours of training, wearing [air-pressured suits](#) and taking chemical showers on leaving containment areas.

She also insisted that no one she knew at the Wuhan institute was ill toward the end of 2019, when the then-unknown virus is believed to have started spreading in the city.

“If people were sick, I assume that I would have been sick — and I wasn’t,” she told Bloomberg News. “I was tested for coronavirus in Singapore before I was vaccinated, and had never had it.”

She also said none of her Wuhan collaborators — some of whom she has worked with since 2016 — did not mention a virus sweeping the lab when she met them at a gathering in Singapore in December 2019.

“There was no chatter,” Anderson said. “Scientists are gossipy and excited. There was nothing strange from my point of view going on at that point that would make you think something is going on here.”

Anderson — a close collaborator with the institute’s now-notorious “bat woman” researcher, Shi Zhengli — also insisted that her former workplace is nowhere near as mysterious as it’s [often portrayed](#).

Danielle Anderson said that the possibility of the Wuhan leak should be part of the investigations into the origins of COVID-19.

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HECTOR RETAMAL/AFP via Getty Images

“It’s not that it was boring, but it was a regular lab that worked in the same way as any other high-containment lab,” she told Bloomberg. “What people are saying is just not how it is.”

She still believes the contagion most likely came from a natural source, and said [Wuhan’s mixture of humans and animals](#), especially wildlife in its wet markets, made the city conducive to spreading zoonotic diseases.

“The pandemic is something no one could have imagined on this scale,” she told Bloomberg.

Chinese virologist Shi Zhengli works inside the P4 laboratory in Wuhan.

Chinese virologist Shi Zhengli works inside the P4 laboratory in Wuhan.

JOHANNES EISELE/AFP via Getty Images

“The virus was in the right place at the right time and everything lined up to cause this disaster.”

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