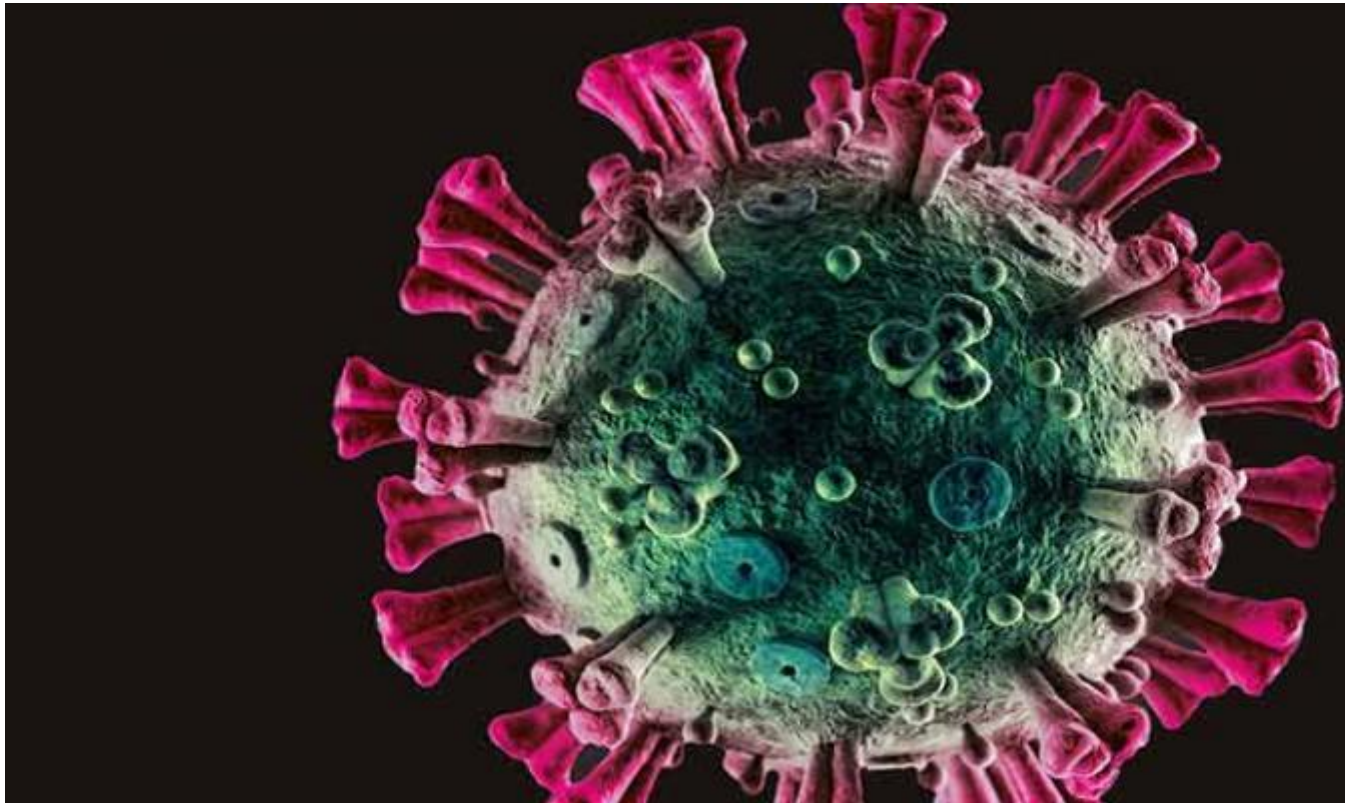


WHO continues to look for answers to COVID



Geneva, February 16 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization will continue pushing until it finds an answer to how the COVID-19 pandemic started, the agency's chief has said following a report suggesting it had abandoned the search. Understanding the origins of the SARS CoV-2 virus and how it began spreading among humans had been considered vital for averting future pandemics.

An article on the Nature website said the WHO had abandoned the search in China, where the outbreak began in late 2019. "We need to continue to push until we get the answer," agency chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters, referring to the search for the origins of the virus.

"Knowing how this pandemic started is very, very important and very crucial," he said. He said he had recently sent a letter to a top official in China "asking for cooperation, because we need cooperation and transparency in the information ... in order to know how this started."

The two main theories that have been hotly debated have centred on the virus naturally spilling over from bats to an intermediary animal and into humans, or escaping due to a lab accident. The Nature report suggested that the WHO has “quietly shelved the second phase of its much-anticipated scientific investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

It quoted Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO expert leading the agency’s COVID response, saying that “there is no phase two”. The WHO planned for work to be done in phases, she told the report, but “that plan has changed”, adding that “The politics across the world of this really hampered progress on understanding the origins.”

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