

Soviets Once Denied a Deadly Anthrax Lab Leak. U.S. Scientists Backed the Story.

The accident and a subsequent cover-up have renewed relevance as scientists search for the origins of Covid-19.



By Anton Troianovski

June 20, 2021

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Origins of COVID-19.



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YEKATERINBURG, Russia — Patients with unexplained pneumonias started showing up at hospitals; within days, dozens were dead. The secret police seized doctors' records and ordered them to keep silent. American spies picked up clues about a lab leak, but the local authorities had a more mundane explanation: contaminated meat.

It took more than a decade for the truth to come out.

In April and May 1979, at least 66 people died after airborne anthrax bacteria emerged from a military lab in the Soviet Union. But leading American scientists voiced confidence in the Soviets' claim that the pathogen had jumped from animals to humans. Only after a full-fledged investigation in the 1990s did one of those scientists confirm the earlier suspicions: The accident in what is now the Russian Urals city of Yekaterinburg was a lab leak, one of the deadliest ever documented.

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