

SibFU professor comments on the artificial origin of the coronavirus

Konstantin Krutovsky, professor of the Department of Genomics and Bioinformatics, Siberian Federal University, commented on the probability of the artificial origin of SARS-CoV-2.



The discussion took place within the framework of a round table on Laboratory Origin of Coronavirus: Arguments, which took place on 16 June 2021 at a press centre of the Izvestia newspaper.



Reasoning about the arguments in favour of the natural or man-made origin of the virus, Konstantin Krutovsky noted: *“The natural origin of the virus seems to be the simplest solution, but this may not be the case. First, lab origin does not mean artificial, and the laboratory does not exclude natural origin. At the moment, there is no direct evidence of either natural or laboratory origin (of the virus).*

SARS-CoV-2 is no different from what we see in nature. Most likely, it is chimeric and recombinant. It has an unusual furin insert in its genome, but similar insertions can be seen in other viruses too. Recombination is also very common among viruses. But until now the researchers have not found the owner of this virus, neither direct nor intermediate, which is strange. The question is whether SARS-CoV-2 has any indications that it has been experimented with. Then it will prove its laboratory origin. It is obvious that they do experiment with coronaviruses, work with the S-gene of the spike protein — yes, there are relevant (scientific) publications. Due to the combination of these indirect factors, it is impossible to exclude the laboratory origin of SARS-CoV-2.”

The scientist also noted that the furin insert in the genome of SARS-CoV-2 looks unusual, although, for example, researchers found a similar insert in the feline variant of the coronavirus.

“Did they (the Wuhan laboratory) want to create a virus with maximum infectivity? Or maybe the task was to create a universal vaccine? A virus that is not highly lethal may itself be such a vaccine. The fact that this virus was synthesized completely anew (this is technically possible) is immediately rejected. But the fact that they experimented with it cannot be ruled out. In the feline variant, the furin insert is similar to the one that we observe in SARS-CoV-2 in terms of amino acid composition, but the nucleotide sequence is completely different there. I am more inclined to the natural origin of SARS-CoV-2, I do not see any clear and unequivocal signs that they experimented with it. But we also see clear signs of selection in the SARS-CoV-2 genome in nonsynonymous amino acid substitutions. Where this selection was — in the laboratory or in nature — is an open question,” the expert concluded.

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