

Key Factual Allegations

In the Missouri Attorney General's lawsuit against the Chinese government, the key factual allegations are that in the critical weeks between December 2019 and January 23, 2020, the Chinese Government engaged in misrepresentations, concealment, and retaliation to conceal the gravity and seriousness of the COVID-19 outbreak from the rest of the world.

1. ***Denying the risk of human-to-human transmission.*** The first known case of human-to-human transmission occurred in early December. By late December, Chinese health officials had plenty of evidence of human-to-human transmission. On December 30, Chinese doctors at Wuhan hospitals posted on social media that they were observing human-to-human transmission. Until January 20, Chinese officials continued to insist that there was no evidence of human transmission—denying solid evidence to the contrary. Additionally, Chinese officials failed to report the potential for human-to-human transmission to the World Health Organization for weeks.
2. ***Silencing of whistleblowers.*** Between January 1 and 3, 2020, Chinese officials arrested eight doctors and forcibly silenced them as “rumor-mongers”—an action that was broadcast on state media, likely to deter others from speaking out. One doctor at a Wuhan emergency room was disciplined when she told her staff to wear masks when dealing with patients, fearing human-to-human transmission. Additionally, there were reports of journalists covering the outbreak who disappeared.
3. ***Failing to contain the outbreak.*** While denying human-to-human transmission, Chinese officials took little to no steps to contain the outbreak. By January 13, the Chinese government was aware of spread to Thailand. For the next week, they began treating COVID-19 as a serious and contagious virus without advising the public. During that time, millions of people traveled through Wuhan, and many thousands were infected, making a worldwide outbreak almost inevitable. A potluck event for 40,000 people went forward in Wuhan on January 16. The Chinese government took no serious steps to contain the outbreak until January 23—when it was far too late.
4. ***Hoarding personal protective equipment.*** Reports indicate that Chinese officials, while they were concealing the outbreak, began hoarding quality PPE while permitting only defective PPE to be exported to the rest of the world. This hoarding endangered the lives of health care workers and first responders in other countries.

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused hardship in Missouri and across the globe—death, isolation from sick and dying loved ones, massive unemployment, economic dislocation, uncertainty, and trillions of dollars of economic losses. China should be held legally responsible.

DHS report: China hid virus' severity to hoard supplies

By WILL WEISSERT May 4, 2020

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials believe China covered up the extent of the coronavirus outbreak — and how contagious the disease is — to stock up on medical supplies needed to respond to it, intelligence documents show.

Chinese leaders “intentionally concealed the severity” of the pandemic from the world in early January, according to a four-page Department of Homeland Security intelligence report dated May 1 and obtained by The Associated Press. The revelation comes as the Trump administration has intensified its criticism of China, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo saying Sunday that that country was responsible for the spread of disease and must be held accountable.

The sharper rhetoric coincides with administration critics saying the government's response to the virus was slow and inadequate. President Donald Trump's political opponents have accused him of lashing out at China, a geopolitical foe but critical U.S. trade partner, in an attempt to deflect criticism at home.

Not classified but marked “for official use only,” the DHS analysis states that, while downplaying the severity of the coronavirus, China increased imports and decreased exports of medical supplies. It attempted to cover up doing so by “denying there were export restrictions and obfuscating and delaying provision of its trade data,” the analysis states.

The report also says China held off informing the World Health Organization that the coronavirus “was a contagion” for much of January so it could order medical supplies from abroad — and that its imports of face masks and surgical gowns and gloves increased sharply.

Those conclusions are based on the 95% probability that China's changes in imports and export behavior were not within normal range, according to the report.

China informed the WHO of the outbreak on Dec. 31. It contacted the U.S. Centers for Disease Control on Jan. 3 and publicly identified the pathogen as a novel coronavirus on Jan. 8.

Chinese officials muffled doctors who warned about the virus early on and repeatedly downplayed the threat of the outbreak. However, many of the Chinese government's missteps appear to have been due to bureaucratic hurdles, tight controls on information and officials hesitant to report bad news. There is no public evidence to suggest it was an intentional plot to buy up the world's medical supplies.

While the virus is believed to have originated in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, most scientists say it was most likely transmitted from bats to humans via an intermediary animal such as the armadillo-like pangolin. That has placed the focus on a wet market in the city where wildlife was sold for food.

The theories about a possible human release have centered on the Wuhan Institute of Virology which undertook research into the transmission of pathogens from animals to people.

Beijing has repeatedly pushed back on U.S. accusations that the outbreak was China's fault, pointing to many missteps made by American officials in their own fight against the outbreak. China's public announcement on Jan. 20 that the virus was transmissible from person to person left the U.S. nearly two months to prepare for the pandemic, during which the U.S. government failed to bolster medical supplies and deployed flawed testing kits.