

Exclusive: Biosafety Expert Blasts New York Times for Claiming USAID Cuts Are 'Setting the Stage for Disease Outbreaks'

Biosafety expert Richard H. Ebright, Ph.D., professor of chemistry and chemical biology and lab director at the Waksman Institute of Microbiology at Rutgers University, said The New York Times got it backwards — in fact, USAID's support for overseas labs and reckless overseas research is to blame for setting the stage for disease outbreaks.

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Cuts in funding for programs run by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are "[Setting the](#)

[Stage for Disease Outbreaks](#),” according to a report last week in The New York Times.

In interviews with the Times, current and former [USAID](#) officials, members of health organizations and experts in infectious diseases described a world “made more perilous” following the Trump administration’s recent cuts to the agency.

However, biosafety expert [Richard H. Ebright, Ph.D.](#), professor of chemistry and chemical biology and lab director at the Waksman Institute of Microbiology at Rutgers University, said the Times got it backwards.

In an exclusive interview today with [The Defender](#), Ebright shared facts not mentioned in the Times article that he said contradicts the Times’ reporting.

“The facts of the matter are that USAID’s and other agencies’ support for overseas labs and reckless overseas research has been setting the stage for disease outbreaks. Ending this insanity will set the stage for reducing disease outbreaks.”

Ebright is on the leadership team of [Biosafety Now](#), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that “advocates for reducing numbers of high-level biocontainment laboratories and for strengthening [biosafety](#), [biosecurity](#), and [biorisk management](#) for research on pathogens.”

He has testified at U.S. House and Senate hearings on biosafety, biosecurity and biorisk management, according to [Rutgers University](#).

Children’s Health Defense CEO Mary Holland said, “Dr. Ebright is spot on — lessening the U.S. role in funding ‘pandemic preparedness’ will reduce outbreaks, not increase them.”

Holland, who receives the print version of the Times, said the March 7 article appeared on today’s front page under the headline, “Deepening Peril of Disease As Trump Cuts Foreign Aid.”



According to Holland, the Times’ core message to readers was “be afraid.”

“The article assumes that cuts to USAID funding means that disease outbreaks will increase — while the reality is likely the opposite,” she said. “USAID has been funding ‘gain-of-function’ or bioweapons research overseas for decades, leading to undisputed lab leaks and outbreaks.”

Gain-of-function research involves experimentation to “increase the transmissibility and/or virulence of

pathogens,” according to a 2016 peer-reviewed paper in [Science and Engineering Ethics](#).

U.S. agencies spent billions constructing ‘unneded and unsafe labs overseas’

Ebright said he found it “ironic” that the opening first line in the Times’ article mentioned “dangerous pathogens left unsecured at labs across Africa.”

He said:

“The main reason there are dangerous pathogens left unsecured at labs across Africa, and in Asia and Latin America, is that U.S. agencies — particularly USAID, [DTRA](#), [BTRP](#), [NIH Fogarty Center](#), and [NIH NIAID](#) — have spent billions of dollars over the last two decades to construct unneeded and unsafe labs overseas, and to fund unneeded and reckless research on discovering and enhancing new dangerous pathogens in labs overseas.”

According to Ebright, USAID gave \$60 million to the “now-debarred criminal NGO [EcoHealth Alliance](#)” to discover new

dangerous pathogens, according to [USAspending.gov](https://www.usaspending.gov).

EcoHealth used those funds “to conduct the wantonly reckless research in Wuhan on SARS coronaviruses that caused COVID-19, killing 20 million and costing \$25 trillion,” Ebright said.

Ebright also said that USAID gave over \$200 million to EcoHealth and its partners in [Project PREDICT](#) to discover new [bioweapons](#) agents overseas, according to [USAspending.gov](https://www.usaspending.gov).

“Prior to the emergence of COVID-19,” Ebright said, “[USAID was planning to launch](#) a 6-fold-expanded, \$1.2 billion megaproject, the Global Virome Project, for EcoHealth and its partners to discover even more new bioweapons agents overseas.”

The [Global Virome Project](#) was designed to discover and catalog thousands of novel viruses that could spill over in nature or pose global biosecurity risks — estimated to be [500,000 viruses](#) or more.



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Gain-of-function research has 'no civilian application'

Ebright has been a vocal critic of gain-of-function research.

In June 2024, he testified before the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on the [origins of COVID-19](#).

During the committee hearing, Ebright said his extensive research and gathering of documents pointed toward a lab leak.

He also said gain-of-function research on potentially dangerous pathogens — like the experiments underway at the [Wuhan lab in China](#) when COVID-19 emerged — “has no civilian application” but is easy for researchers to do and make money doing.

“Researchers undertake it because it is fast, it is easy, it requires no specialized equipment or skills, and it was prioritized for funding and has been prioritized for publication by scientific journals,” Ebright said.

“These are major incentives to researchers worldwide, in China and in the U.S.,” he pointed out.

Gain-of-function research is largely unregulated, according to Ebright, who said there needs to be an independent agency that oversees and imposes “regulation on this scientific community that has successfully resisted and obstructed regulation for two decades.”

Agency Capture

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