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**To:** 郭德银[guodeyin@mail.sysu.edu.cn]  
**From:** John Ziebuhr[john.ziebuhr@viro.med.uni-giessen.de]  
**Sent:** Sat 2/15/2020 7:55:22 AM (UTC-05:00)  
**Subject:** Re: virus name

Dear Dr. Deyin Guo, dear colleagues,  
I am sorry to learn that I was not able to get my point across, which is that the name SARS-CoV-2 links this virus to other viruses (called SARS-CoVs or SARSr-CoVs) in this species including the prototype virus of the species rather than to the disease that once inspired the naming of this prototype virus nearly 20 years ago. The suffix -2 is used as a unique identifier and indicates that SARS-CoV-2 is yet ANOTHER (but closely related) virus in this species. I'd like to thank you for your comments because they indicate that we may need to explain our line of reasoning even more clearly when it comes to publishing a more advanced version of our manuscript.

As you again link virus classification and naming to specific diseases (as was unfortunately done quite frequently in the pre-genomic era) rather than to sequence relationships of the respective virus with previously identified viruses, I would like to ask you whether your reasoning implies that researchers describing all the other viruses in that species were wrong when they named the viruses they discovered? To my knowledge, the vast majority of these viruses has not been shown to cause a human disease called SARS and yet, they were called SARS coronaviruses or SARS-related coronaviruses in virtually all cases. I think it is accepted in the field that these viruses are genetically closely related but also differ in specific phenotypic aspects from one another, which is reflected (at the level of naming) by attaching pre- and suffixes to the (SARS-containing) virus name. When introducing the name SARS-CoV-2, the CSG followed the tradition established mainly by Chinese researchers to name viruses in this particular species.

With kind regards,

John Ziebuhr

—  
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Am 15.02.2020 um 07:32 schrieb 郭德银 <[guodeyin@mail.sysu.edu.cn](mailto:guodeyin@mail.sysu.edu.cn)>:

Dear Dr. John and CSG members,

Thank you very much for your prompt reply and for your willingness to listen to us, the representatives of Chinese virologists in coronavirus studies.

After discussing with many members of the Chinese Society for Virology of Chinese Society for Microbiology, and the Sub-Society for Medical Virology of Chinese Medical Association, we still believe that SARS-CoV-2 is not the most appropriate name for 2019-nCoV.

You claimed that the CSG does not intend to make any reference to a specific disease (for example a severe respiratory disease in humans) when introducing yet another virus name derived from the term "SARS".

However, "SARS" is a disease name, and if the new virus is called SARS-CoV-2, it actually implies for SARS, especially for non-corona virologists and the public domain. In such sense, it is truly misleading. It is clear that there are significant differences in viral genome, transmissibility, and pathogenicity and pathogenesis of the diseases caused by 2019-nCoV and SARS-CoV. We are concerning about the name of a natural virus in one virus species, and we think that the natural virus should have its unique name to show some of its own properties. This is similar to the situation for Betacoronavirus 1, where the species includes several distinct natural viruses with their unique names, e.g. human OC43 and bovine coronavirus, and Alphacoronavirus, which includes distinct natural viruses like feline infectious peritonitis coronavirus, canine CoV and transmissible gastroenteritis coronavirus. It is not appropriate to use one disease-based virus' name (like SARS-CoV) to name all other natural viruses that belong to the same species but have very different properties.

To the best of our knowledge, none of the virologists from mainland of China attended the CSG's discussion on 2019-nCoV, and CSG had not consulted with virologists including the first discoverers of the virus and first describers of the disease from mainland of China before making the decision. It is our wish that the CSG can take our opinion into the consideration.

It appears to us (as from the News reports of Science and Nature) that the CSG and WHO did not consult with each other in naming the virus and the disease. It will be very confusing to use totally different or unrelated names for the virus and its disease. We hope that the CSG of ICTV, the WHO and the Chinese side can have a trilateral negotiation on the naming issues.

Because of these reasons, we still hope CSG being able to reconsider naming 2019-nCoV. Our suggestion is to name it as TARS-CoV, but not SARS-CoV-2.

Thank you very much for your help!

Sincerely yours,

Deyin Guo, on behalf of the group:

Zhengli Shi, Wuhan Institute of Virology, Chinese Academy of Sciences  
Shibo Jiang, Fudan University School of Medicine  
Wenjie Tan, China Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
Yuelong Shu, Sun Yat-sen University, School of Public Health (Shenzhen)  
Deyin Guo, Sun Yat-sen University School of Medicine

-----Original Messages-----

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**Subject:** virus name

Dear Deyin, dear Zhengli, dear Shibo, dear colleagues,

Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts with me and other members of the CSG. Obviously, I (personally) cannot speak for other CSG members but would like to tell you and your colleagues that I am very grateful for your very thoughtful and balanced statement.