

Health Department Covers Up Illegal Lab in California

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)

✓ Fact Checked

September 05, 2023

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › In mid-December 2022, an illegal Chinese medical lab was discovered in Reedley, California, in a dilapidated warehouse. The company, Universal Meditech Inc. – which was operating without a state license or other required permits – was manufacturing a wide variety of test kits, including pregnancy tests, ovulation tests, COVID-19 test kits and various drug tests
- › The lab was found to be improperly storing at least 20 infectious agents, including E. coli, coronavirus, malaria, hepatitis B and C, dengue, chlamydia, herpes, rubella and HIV
- › Investigations were launched by local, state and federal authorities, all of whom concluded there was no criminal activity going on at the lab, nor any evidence that the lab posed a threat to public health or national security
- › August 11, 2023, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a warning about several of the tests produced in the Reedley lab. Universal Meditech has also issued a recall of tests that have already been sent to distributors, but not for tests that have already reached consumers
- › While the investigation into the illicit lab began in late December 2022, the public wasn't informed about its existence until July 2023. According to local officials, state and federal agencies told them to keep quiet

In mid-December 2022, Jesalyn Harper, a code enforcement officer for the city of Reedley, California, responded to a seemingly routine complaint about parked cars outside a run-down decades-old warehouse.

She got suspicious when she discovered a garden hose protruding through a rear wall, and a foul odor coming from a ventilation fan.

Inside, she was met by three Chinese women wearing lab coats, plastic gloves and surgical masks. The company, Universal Meditech Inc. – which was operating without a state license or other required permits – was reportedly manufacturing a wide variety of test kits, including pregnancy tests, ovulation tests, COVID-19 test kits and various drug tests.^{1,2} The company distributed the tests under the name Prestige Biotech Inc.

As reported by ABC News,³ when Harper conducted an impromptu inspection of the building, she found "dozens of refrigerators and ultralow-temperature freezers hooked to illegal wiring; vials of blood and jars of urine in shelves and plastic containers; and about 1,000 white lab mice being kept in crowded, soiled containers."

Many of the mice were dead in their cages; others were in distress.⁴ The lab was later found to also be improperly storing at least 20 infectious agents, including E. coli, coronavirus, malaria, hepatitis B and C, dengue, chlamydia, herpes, rubella and HIV.^{5,6,7}

In broken English, the women told Harper the owner resided in China, and gave her a phone number and email address. Alarmed by what she'd found, Harper contacted Fresno County health officials and the FBI.

Investigators Claim There Was No Threat

Local, state and federal authorities all launched investigations, concluding there was no criminal activity going on at the lab, nor any evidence that the lab posed a threat to public health or national security.

The mice, said to have been genetically engineered to carry SARS-CoV-2, were inspected by a veterinarian associated with the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

According to the vet, the mice had not been exposed to any kind of experimentation. They'd only been used to grow SARS-CoV-2 antibodies. The owner of the business told

the Fresno health department that the mice were used to confirm their COVID test worked.

In March 2023, Reedley officials took legal action to shut the lab down.⁸ Working with the city of Reedley, the Fresno County Department of Public Health first got a court-issued warrant to inspect the property, where they discovered hazardous materials, chemicals and medical waste.

Photos⁹ show rows of dirty freezers and bare floors covered in dirt. To think this dilapidated, dirty-beyond-belief facility was producing medical tests, which need to be produced in controlled, sterile surroundings, is just shocking.

As of July 7, 2023, all biological agents have been cleaned out and destroyed by the Fresno health department.¹⁰ The property has since been declared abandoned and will be torn down.¹¹

FDA Warning for Reedley Lab Tests Has Been Issued

August 11, 2023, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a warning¹² about several of the test kits produced in the Reedley lab. Universal Meditech has also issued a recall of tests that have already been sent to distributors, but not for tests that have already reached consumers.

The tests are known to have been sold online under the brand names of the following four distributors, and they may not have identified Universal Meditech as the manufacturer. The tests may also have been sold by other distributors (and hence under other brand names) as well:¹³

- Prestige Biotech Inc.
- AC&C Distribution LLC
- HealthyWiser
- Home Health U.S. Inc.

The specific tests affected by the FDA's warning are:¹⁴

One Step Pregnancy Test	DiagnosUS One Step Ovulation Test	HealthyWiser UriTest 10 Parameter Reagent Test Strips for Urinalysis
HealthyWiser UriTest UTI Test Strips	HealthyWiser KetoFast Ketone Test Strips	HealthyWiser pH-Aware pH Test Strips
To Life hCG Pregnancy Urine Test	Am I Pregnant Pregnancy Midstream Test	DeTec hCG Pregnancy Urine Test
PrestiBio Pregnancy Strips	PrestiBio Rapid Detection Pregnancy Test Midstream	PrestiBio Ovulation Strips
PrestiBio Urinalysis Test Strip 10 Parameters	PrestiBio Ketone Test Strips	PrestiBio Breast Milk Alcohol Test Strips

The FDA's recommendations regarding these tests, are as follows:¹⁵

- Do not purchase or use any of these tests.
- If you've purchased any of these tests, throw them out.
- If you've used any of these tests, do not trust the results. Test again with a different test.
- If you've experienced a quality problem with any of these tests, contact the [FDA's MedWatch Adverse Event Reporting program](#).

State and Federal Officials Wanted It Kept Quiet

Reedley city manager Nicole Zieba told ABC News,¹⁶ "They were bad actors. They never came to the city and they moved in in the middle of the night. Those are pretty big elements that tell us they did not want us to know they were here."

According to Zieba, the lab had been operating illegally in Reedley since October 2022. Before that, the company had operated – and been kicked out of – Canada; Texas; Fresno, California; Tulare, California; and Fresno again, before moving into Reedley.¹⁷

While the investigation into the illicit lab began in late December 2022, the public wasn't informed about its existence until July 2023. According to Zieba and other local officials, state and federal agencies told them to keep quiet.¹⁸ Joe Prado, who works with the Fresno County Department of Public Health, told MSN:¹⁹

"As we were communicating with state and federal agencies, they're making it very clear, we cannot speak on this. This is our protocol, this is what they adhered to and they're not able to speak on an ongoing investigation. They've made that clear pretty much since day one."

Zieba told ABC News she decided to heed their advice since the Department of Toxic Substances Control found no threats in the water, sewer system or air. "Had there been any hazard to their safety, we would have immediately notified the public," she said.

While staying mum about an ongoing investigation might seem reasonable to those doing the investigating, considering public trust in government is at an all-time low, transparency would seem more prudent. As noted by the editor of Everything South City:²⁰

"Concerned residents cannot be dismissed as annoying 'Gadflies' by city officials or staff, they must be taken seriously and addressed. For each question posed, there are 50+ others seeking the same answers, although they might not articulate the questions themselves."

"Our 'gadflies' are an important part of our societal ecosystem and we need to encourage the public to speak up and ask for clarity when they have questions and we must demand timely answers that aren't CYA narrative from those sworn to protect us. Public servants must remember they are not rulers over us, as some might believe, but they are here to serve us all ..."

No Medical Lab Oversight

Fears about bioweapons production in rural America aside, the discovery of the illegal lab in Reedley has also exposed another problem, which is that there's no governmental agency in charge of overseeing private medical labs.²¹ As noted by Harper:²²

"We're finding out that with these private labs, there really isn't as much regulation as there is for publicly funded labs, labs that receive grants. There's no one technically looking for them."

The frightening reality is that no one knows how many other facilities like Universal Meditech there might be in the U.S. and elsewhere. According to ABC News:²³

"House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican who represents a Congressional district neighboring Reedley's, said ... he plans to raise concerns over the 'very disturbing' case with colleagues on the Select Committee on China and follow up with the FBI."

'My concern is to get to the bottom of what happened here but to also look at where this is happening in other parts of this country as well,' McCarthy said."

Shoddy and unprofessional labs like Universal Meditech aren't the only private facilities that can pose a threat to public health. Genentech, owned by Roche, was in August 2021 found to be in violation of hazardous waste management, including hazardous waste air emissions, at three different locations in South San Francisco.²⁴

Violations included storing hazardous medical waste without a permit, failing to meet requirements related to monitoring hazardous waste air emissions, failing to properly mark hazardous waste equipment, failing to perform required inspections of emissions control equipment, failing to maintain overfill protection controls for a hazardous waste tank, and not including necessary federal waste codes on hazardous waste manifests. In August 2023, Genentech was ordered to pay \$158,208 in civil penalties as a result.²⁵

COVID Pandemic and Reedley Lab Are Stark Warnings

Between the COVID pandemic (which most likely was the result of a biolab accident in Wuhan, China), and the discovery of an illegal lab in Reedley (which haphazardly stored infectious pathogens in a facility deemed so dilapidated that it must now be torn down), I'd say there's cause for concern.

“ One of the greatest threats mankind currently faces is the proliferation of biolabs, from high-security laboratories to the kind run by Universal Meditech. ”

How many more illegal labs are there in the U.S.? How many around the world? How many infectious pathogens are out there, stored in freezers with makeshift wiring and handled by workers wearing nothing but plastic gloves and surgical masks? How many seemingly "respectable" companies are cutting corners in their hazardous waste management and their biosecurity?

It seems clear that one of the greatest threats mankind currently faces is the proliferation of biolabs, from high-security laboratories to the kind run by Universal Meditech. It's just a matter of time before something truly nasty gets out. This is why I believe we must push for a total ban on gain-of-function research that can make a pathogen more lethal.

Families Sue EcoHealth Alliance Over Coronavirus Research

Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be sufficient political will to grapple with this threat. That would probably be the most effective strategy. Instead, people are forced to turn to lawsuits.

The families of four people who died from COVID-19 are now suing EcoHealth Alliance,²⁶ the National Institutes of Health-funded nonprofit that funneled research dollars to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV).

The lawsuit, filed with the Manhattan Supreme Court, argues that EcoHealth Alliance funded coronavirus research at the WIV that led to the creation of SARS-CoV-2, and that president Peter Daszak knew the virus was dangerous and "capable of causing a worldwide pandemic."

EcoHealth and Daszak are also being sued by four more families and three COVID survivors. Two of the lawsuits are filed in New York state and one in Pennsylvania. As reported by the New York Post, August 12, 2023:²⁷

"Despite partially-funding the Wuhan Institute of Virology, where the virus originated, EcoHealth failed to make sure critical safety measures were in place – then worked to cover up the origins of the outbreak, they claimed in court papers.

'If we had known the source or origin of this virus and had not been misled that it was from a pangolin in a wet market, and rather we knew that it was a genetically manipulated virus, and that the scientists involved were concealing that from our clients, the outcome could have been very different,' Patricia Finn, the victims' attorney, told The Post ...

'[The families of the deceased] are ... enraged because the truth of what really happened appears to be coming forward,' Finn added ...

In a June report, the Government Accountability Office said that EcoHealth Alliance – which doles out money given to them by the National Institutes of Health – gave \$1,413,720 to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, while a separate investigation found the government may have paid millions in duplicating grants to the Wuhan-based research institutions through EcoHealth."

With any amount of luck, lawsuits against the companies, organizations and individuals involved in risky gain-of-function research on coronaviruses will make these mad scientists think twice. Still, we need a comprehensive worldwide ban, a solid international agreement, to safeguard the world from pandemics like COVID-19.

If viruses are being engineered to be more deadly, and if they're stored in labs and shoddy warehouses around the world, something truly devastating will eventually get out. We don't need [One Health](#). We don't need the [World Health Organization's pandemic treaty](#). Biosecurity calls, first and foremost, for a worldwide ban on risky gain-of-function research.

Sources and References

- [1, 22 Shockya.com August 8, 2023](#)
- [2 Legal Insurrection August 16, 2023](#)
- [3, 5, 16, 21, 23 ABC News August 9, 2023](#)
- [4, 6, 8, 10, 11 ABC30.com August 9, 2023](#)
- [7, 20, 24, 25 Everything South City August 12, 2023](#)
- [9 KMPH.com Photo Gallery](#)
- [12, 15 FDA Warning August 11, 2023](#)
- [13, 14 Fresno Bee August 15, 2023](#)
- [17, 19 MSN August 10, 2023](#)
- [18 Fox News August 9, 2023](#)
- [26, 27 New York Post August 12, 2023](#)