

# U.S. indictment says Chinese hackers tried to steal COVID-19 vaccine and drug research



The U.S. Department of Justice accused two Chinese nationals of trying to steal COVID-19 research. (Getty Images)

Only days after three governments said Russian hackers were targeting groups conducting COVID-19 vaccine research, the U.S. has indicted two Chinese nationals for hacking hundreds of companies, governments and other organizations in the U.S. and beyond, including those working to combat the pandemic.

A grand jury in Washington state returned an 11-count indictment against Li Xiaoyu and Dong Jiazhi for a 10-year “hacking campaign” targeting high-tech industries in the U.S. and several other countries. Recently, the hackers shifted their focus to companies researching COVID-19 vaccines, drugs and tests, according to authorities.

Federal officials say the hackers worked from China, both for their own profit and for the benefit of the Ministry of State Security, part of China’s government. The alleged hackers aren’t likely to face trial because China and the U.S. don’t have an extradition treaty, The New York Times reports.

“China has now taken its place, alongside Russia, Iran and North Korea, in that shameful club of nations that provide a safe haven for cyber criminals in exchange for those criminals being ‘on call’ to work for the benefit of the state, here to feed the Chinese Communist party’s insatiable hunger for American and other non-Chinese companies’ hard-earned intellectual property, including COVID-19 research,” John Demers, assistant attorney general for national security, said in a statement.

The allegations come days after the U.K., U.S. and Canada said hackers affiliated with Russia’s government have been targeting COVID-19 vaccine researchers. Security officials said a group called APT29, which also goes by the names “the Dukes” or “Cozy Bear,” has deployed “WellMess” and “WellMail” to steal information worldwide.

RELATED: Russian hackers feverishly working to steal COVID-19 vaccine research, governments say

Since those allegations, AstraZeneca confirmed a COVID-19 vaccine collaboration with Russian drugmaker R-Pharm that’ll allow that company to produce and distribute AZ’s coronavirus vaccine in Russia and eight other countries. Russian officials denied the hacking allegations and pointed to the AZ deal as evidence the country doesn’t need to steal secrets.

Worldwide, more than 160 groups are working on COVID-19 vaccine candidates, and 24 have reached human testing, according to the World Health Organization. Researchers in China have advanced several mid- and late-stage candidates, the agency says.