

Press Release from Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society

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1 in 6 critical NHS supplies depend on China - costing £6.2 billion a year

- *Health chiefs warned that China could 'switch off' critical medical supplies*
- *NHS "dangerously reliant" on China as number of critical medical supplies purchased from Chinese government TREBLES in a year.*
- *1 in 6 of critical medical supplies come from China – with the NHS giving the Chinese government more than £600 million a month to prop up the NHS.*

Shocking new analysis from the Civitas think tank uncovers the extent to which the NHS is reliant on China for vital medical supplies, such as oxygen, protective clothing and medicines.

In a stark warning to health bosses 1 in 6 (17 per cent) of products contained on the Government's "Disaster Relief List" are sourced from China bringing into question our reliance on the Chinese for medical supplies.

This government list of vital medical supplies shows how reliant we are on the Chinese state for everyday items used in the NHS. In the last year the UK government has spent over £6 billion to keep the NHS going with Chinese manufactured medical supplies – a figure that has trebled in less than a year.

Civitas is calling for an emergency 'NHS Security Act' to ensure that we wean ourselves off Chinese medical supplies warning that "China could switch off medical supplies" in future foreign policy spats.

A new investigative report out today uncovers the extent to which the NHS depends on the Chinese government, the report called “Chinese presence in NHS supply chains” shows some items are heavily reliant on the Chinese government:

- 37 per cent of testing and diagnostic items used to detect dangerous viruses.
- A quarter (24 per cent) of all medical consumables such as oxygen, needles and syringes.
- A third (30 per cent) of PPE and protective items to keep our NHS workers safe

Almost all paper masks used by medics in hospitals come from China (90 per cent), more than half of all gloves (54 per cent) and almost 80 per cent of bandages.

Bizarrely almost half (45 per cent) of bedside monitors now come from China, up from 0 in 2015 and 42 per cent of emergency trolleys and wheelchairs. Almost 90 per cent of our supplies of E45 creams, used everyday to treat rashes and itches come from China.

New figures for 2021 show how the health chiefs have turned to China rather than UK manufacturers to keep the NHS afloat.

Before the pandemic the UK government sourced 6 per cent of vital medical supplies on the Disaster Relief List from China. By 2020 this figure had hit 17 per cent – almost treble the previous amount.

The latest figures (up to 2021) show we are still sending around £600 million a month to China for critical supplies to keep the NHS going.

These new figures undermine the Prime Minister’s promise to “end reliance on Chinese imports” for vital medical supplies when launching plans to ensure that the UK is never again required to go ‘cap in hand’ to China. Civitas has raised alarm bells about so called “chokehold risks” which allow the Chinese government to “switch off our medicines” as it “weaponises” medical products.

The author of this alarming new study, **Robert Clark**, head of defence and security at Civitas, issued a wake up call to health chiefs:

“Before the pandemic hit only 6 per cent of vital medical supplies were shipped in from China a figure that has now shot up to almost a sixth. Things like gloves, monitors, wheelchairs and bandages all largely come from China rather than the UK. We are dangerously over reliant on China.

When the pandemic hit we were caught napping and had to go ‘cap in hand’ to China to keep the NHS afloat – the health equivalent of going to the IMF for a loan in the 1970s. Because of this we are now sending the Chinese government over £6 billion a year in UK taxpayers cash to import basic medical supplies.

Let’s not be naïve about China. This is an urgent issue for health bosses with the risk that future geo-political spats could lead to the Chinese switching off critical medical supplies destined for the NHS”

Alicia Kearns MP, co-chair of the China Research Group:

"This is an important report which exposes NHS reliance on China for critical medical supplies.

With well over £6 billion of UK cash being handed over to Chinese manufacturers, we need to ensure that the NHS isn't reliant on China for everyday items and more serious supplies we will need at a time of crisis.

Dependence on a single country is a recipe for failure and that's why I've been working to get the Procurement Bill to account for human rights and modern day slavery."

ENDS

NOTE TO EDITORS:

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Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society is an independent, cross-party think tank which seeks to facilitate informed public debate. We search for solutions to social and economic problems unconstrained by the short-term priorities of political parties or conventional wisdom.