



From: Broydrick & Associates
Date: October 17th, 2025
Re: Malaysian Rubber Glove

Introduction

It will be difficult for a domestic medical glove manufacturing industry to be competitive with Asian companies in the global market. Medical gloves produced in Asia are made with inexpensive labor that cannot be duplicated in the United States. Moreover, after the COVID pandemic in 2020, the government gave large grants of money to domestic manufacturers. Aside from one, none of them were successful. With an annual projected need of roughly 100 billion medical gloves, it is impractical to conclude that the United States can meet this production goal in the future. The medical glove market, particularly in Malaysia, will continue to dominate because of its low labor costs, proximity to raw materials, and mature supply chains which give overwhelming cost advantages over any US or developed economy manufacturer.

State of the Medical Glove Industry

- I. Background on medical gloves industry
 - A. The rubber used to make a vast majority of the medical gloves in the United States is called nitrile butadiene rubber (“NBR”). NBR is used extensively throughout the healthcare industry and is the preferred material of medical professionals due to latex allergies.¹

- II. Current demands
 - A. The U.S. demand for medical gloves is more than 100 billion units per year. Expecting domestic companies to meet this demand is unrealistic.² The idea of “self sufficiency” in the medical gloves industry is an impractical goal to meet America’s healthcare demands particularly with the industry’s concentration in the Asian markets and the abundance of natural rubber in Malaysia.

III. Glove Manufacturing Process

¹ [More medical gloves are coming from China, as U.S. makers of protective gear struggle](#)

² [Reducing Glove Overuse in Outpatient Specialty Clinics](#)

- A. The process of manufacturing medical gloves is not a simple task involving a complex process of formal cleaning, coagulant dipping, latex dipping, bleaching, drying and vulcanization, powdering, and finally stripping before being sent off for packaging.³ The industry is very labor-intensive, requiring significant manpower to manufacture and produce.⁴ Top producers, like Malaysia, have dominated this industry due to its cheap labor supply and natural resource of rubber trees.⁵
- B. Case Study: Grants Given Out During Pandemic for Domestic Manufacturers
 1. During the pandemic, the Department of Defense gave out grants to the domestic medical glove industry. Specifically, the Department of Defense announced in 2021 that it would, on behalf of HHS, provide over \$123 million for the chemical plant, Blue Star NBR, that would produce the rubber necessary to produce medical gloves. However, to this day, this plant is not operational and the proposed site currently is an empty lot.⁶ Greg Burel, the former stockpile director, stated that American PPE manufacturers simply are “never going to outcompete many of the foreign-made products.”⁷ Moreover, the CEO of a different would-be glove manufacturer emphasized that it is nonsensical to produce domestic gloves if the United States is already relying on imported raw materials, including NBR. “Even if the government set up subsidies and incentives to make American PPE more attractive to American consumers, customers would be spending money for something that, most of the time, isn’t needed.” To the primary customers of medical-grade gloves like large hospital consortiums and healthcare distributors- that it would be “a really hard sell.”⁸

IV. Medical Gloves are Not a National Security Threat

A. Diversified Supply Chains Ensure Security

1. The U.S. does not rely on a specific or singular foreign source for gloves. Since 2020, supply chains for gloves have diversified across multiple countries, including Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. This reduces the risk of becoming overly dependent on any one source and the risk of disruptions during global crises. Imports strengthen domestic manufacturing by supporting steady flow of essential goods and help maintain a secure and reliable stock. Maintaining open trade ensures that

³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405896322001434>

⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405896322001434>

⁵ [Global Glove Production Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

⁶ [More medical gloves are coming from China, as U.S. makers of protective gear struggle](#)

⁷ [More medical gloves are coming from China, as U.S. makers of protective gear struggle](#)

⁸ [More medical gloves are coming from China, as U.S. makers of protective gear struggle](#)

the U.S. can draw from global suppliers, ensuring readiness for future emergencies.

B. PPE Is a Commercial Product– Not a Defense Material

1. Gloves are basic and high volume medical goods rather than defense materials. They can be safely stockpiled for long periods and restricting trade in such goods on national security grounds would be counterproductive.

C. Stockpiling Mitigates Any National Security Concerns

1. A potential natural security concern can be addressed through a one-time investment to expand the number of gloves in the Strategic National Stockpile. Regularly replenishing federal and state reserves with both domestic and imported supplies strengthens America’s readiness and resilience in emergencies. The mix of reliable domestic and

Conclusion and Next Steps

It isn’t realistic to expect a U.S. medical glove industry to match Malaysia, Thailand, or China in size or cost. Even with heavy federal funding subsidizing production, most domestic projects have struggled to get off the ground or sustain operations. The U.S. faces higher labor and material costs, a smaller supplier base, and a market that consistently buys from the lowest-priced source.

A smarter path is to focus on maintaining a modest level of domestic production to protect against future supply shocks, while using targeted subsidies or long-term government purchasing agreements to keep those facilities viable. Expectations should be practical, and domestic manufacturers can play a role in national preparedness, but they will never replace the global suppliers that dominate the market.

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Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, D.C

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