



# French drugmakers urge Brexit negotiators to safeguard supply chain

PARIS (Reuters) - French drugmakers are urging European and British negotiators ahead of a crunch Brexit meeting next month to ensure the free circulation of medicines is maintained if Britain leaves the bloc without a deal next year.

Supplies of thousands of medicines risk disruption if Britain leaves the European Union without an accord on March 29, 2019, forcing manufacturers to prepare duplicate product-testing and licensing arrangements to keep drugs on the market.

A Reuters poll conducted this month showed economists and analysts estimate a 25 percent chance of Britain leaving the EU without a deal.

More than 2,600 drugs have some part of the manufacturing carried out in Britain, while 45 million patient packs are supplied from Britain to EU countries each month, industry figures show. Another 37 million flow to Britain from the EU.



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“We are concerned because we are seeing that health and drugs, in particular, do not appear to be at the top of the agenda of Brexit negotiations when they clearly should be,” Philippe Lamoureux, head of France’s pharmaceuticals lobby LEEM, told Reuters on Thursday.

“In every European member state, task forces have been set up to assess what the implications of Brexit could be for the pharmaceutical sector. In any case, free circulation of medicines must be maintained in the interest of patients on both sides of the Channel.”

## RISKS

In Germany, drugmakers have been asked by the government to examine their supply chains for any vulnerability that could cause shortages of essential drugs.

Lamoureux said France had not been approached in a similar way but that some companies were taking the initiative anyway.

France’s largest drugmaker Sanofi ([SASY.PA](#)) last month said it would increase medicine stockpiles in Britain, echoing moves made by AstraZeneca ([AZN.L](#)), GlaxoSmithKline ([GSK.L](#)), Roche ([ROG.S](#)) and Novartis ([NOVN.S](#)).

“Britain is France’s third European customer when it comes to drugs exports. Looking the other way, Britain is



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France's seventh supplier," Lamoureux said, adding that it was premature to try to predict Brexit's impact on jobs.



“One can imagine that part of the Britain-based production could be reallocated to other European countries but, at the same time, some groups could also decide to rebase some of their activities in the UK only,” he said.

The European Medicines Agency, which oversees drug safety across the bloc, warned last month of bigger than



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expected staff losses and cuts in some operations as a result of having to move from London to Amsterdam because of Brexit.

Europe's equivalent of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration now expects to lose around 30 percent of its workforce as it prepares to relocate by next March.

Lamoureux pointed to risks in production, supply chain and marketing as some medicines are produced in Britain before being packaged on the continent and sent back to Britain for sale.

“A very important EU ministers’ meeting will be taking place in October regarding Brexit. We very much hope a deal will be reached but information we are getting day by day suggests it may not be the case,” Christelle Marechal, in charge of European matters for the lobby, said.

Britain is still working towards reaching a Brexit deal with the EU, Prime Minister Theresa May said on Wednesday, although some officials have said an October deadline for an agreement was likely to slip to November.

