

China Red Cross calls for urgent blood donations

29 October 2010, By CHI-CHI ZHANG , Associated Press

(AP) -- China's Red Cross asked citizens around the country Friday to urgently donate blood because of an acute shortage that has prompted delays in some surgeries.

An emergency notice on the agency's website said blood was in especially short supply this year and called for emergency measures, such as blood drives, in Beijing and the provinces of Yunnan, Shandong, Jilin, Hubei and Guangdong.

Health Minister Chen Zhu, along with nearly 500 people from the Ministry of Health, donated blood on Friday in the hope of encouraging others, according to a notice on the ministry's website.

The demand for blood has increased in recent years as health services improve, the notice said.

Many Chinese are suspicious of blood drives after tainted blood passed HIV to thousands of people in the 1990s.

This year's shortage is a first in many years. Blood donations in recent months are down nearly 40 percent in Beijing compared to the same periods in previous years, according to the Beijing [Red Cross Blood Center](#) website.

"The blood storage in Beijing is dropping, but the current blood supply can satisfy the needs of the emergency medical treatment of the hospitals," said a woman who answered the phone at the Beijing Red Cross Blood Center who refused to give her name. "The main reason is that we had fewer donors when the weather was getting cold."

The sudden drop in clinical blood supplies, especially in Kunming in the southern province of Yunnan, since this summer has been attributed to a lack of volunteer donors - namely college students and migrant workers, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Hospitals across Yunnan, more than 200 in Kunming alone, have had to postpone surgeries and other procedures such as blood transfusions, Xinhua said. Officials at local hospitals said blood drives are helping, but more donors are still needed.

"Of course we won't hold off major surgeries, but those that require a lot of blood, more than 600 millimeters, have been postponed," said a woman who answered the phone at the [blood transfusion center](#) of the First People's Hospital in Kunming who refused to give her name. "The situation is improving, but we still need donations. Some relatives have even gone to blood centers to donate themselves so their family members can get into the surgery room."

In recent years, the government has cracked down on agents who collect or supply blood that caused victims to contract AIDS, hepatitis B, hepatitis C or syphilis.

Unhygienic blood-buying rings were responsible for infecting thousands of people with HIV in rural areas of central China during the mid-1990s, which resulted in stricter laws on donating blood, making it illegal to sell [blood](#) without approval.

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