

City urged to take on climate change to help its health

HEALTH

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The head of a world-leading philanthropic group urged Hong Kong to focus on ways to tackle climate change as a way to stave off health crises.

Her comment came as the city grappled in recent weeks with an overstretched health care system. Debates over how to cope with overloaded hospitals grew heated, with many contending more doctors and nurses were needed.

Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, a globally recognised private foundation whose mission is to promote the well-being of humanity, told the *Post* there was no single magic bullet in handling a health care crisis. She said enhanced manpower was not the best way to ease the public sector's overstretched capacity.

Rodin, who visited the city last week for an Asia Society event, warned extreme weather would result in a wide variety of health crises. She urged the city, which saw 18 temperature-related records broken last year, to tackle the problem at its roots.

As an example, Rodin cited dengue fever, a viral disease once

thought to be confined to tropical locations. "Dengue is moving to cooler and cooler climates and is changing where it's locating throughout Asia," she said.

The World Health Organisation warned earlier that above-average rainfall caused by El Nino would create a more favourable environment for mosquitoes spreading diseases, including the recent outbreak of the Zika virus.

The potential Zika threat loomed locally as 13 cases had already been identified on the mainland and one case was found in South Korea, a popular travel destination for Hongkongers. In addition, five Zika patients were reported to have travelled via Hong Kong to the mainland.

Rodin said governments should adopt a new approach by integrating efforts of different ministries to tackle health crises.

She called on government ministries of health, agriculture, energy and environment to work together. "These problems don't sit conveniently in little silos," Rodin said. "Governments have to fundamentally reorganise."

She said it was not simply a matter of offering better medical care, but of "thinking about curing the planet, the water and the air before people get sick".

Rodin added hiring more people in the health care sector might not be the best way to help it.

"It's responding after the fact," she continued. "Training health care personnel is a necessary but not sufficient response for the health care system... More resources have to be spent on detection, surveillance, awareness and communication."



Rockefeller Foundation president Judith Rodin. Photo: Dickson Lee