

## Testing Zika on consenting humans: Were ethicists right to get in the way?

This was the proposal: Deliberately infect a small group of consenting adults with the Zika virus to learn about the disease and speed up the search for a vaccine.

So the National Institutes of Health called for an ethics consultation and asked two essential questions: Can a Zika “human challenge” study be ethically justified? If so, under what conditions?

The panel’s answer, in short, was this: The research could be justified, but conditions must be met. They [pushed pause](#) on the Zika study.

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Appreciation for ethics review is not universally shared among research scientists...Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker memorably [wrote](#), “A truly ethical bioethics should not bog down research in red tape...based on nebulous but sweeping principles such as ‘dignity,’ ‘sacredness,’ or ‘social justice.’ ”

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[However,] the panel’s reasoning and findings are compelling. They...indicated an awareness of a history too often either forgotten or considered yesterday’s problem.

That history is known by its settings — from [Nuremberg](#) to Willowbrook, [Tuskegee](#) to [Guatemala](#) — all shorthand for abuses in human subject research. Those cases, some of which continued for decades, are why bioethics came into being.

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So when voluntary human subjects give informed consent, they should be able to trust that the researchers and their financial backers — government or otherwise — gave as much thought to the experiment’s risks to the participants as they did to the potential benefits to society.

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [In Pausing Human Research On Zika, Medical Ethicists Acknowledge A Dark Past](#)**

**For more background on the Genetic Literacy Project, read [GLP](#) on Wikipedia.**