

Zika virus could offer new way to attack deadly brain cancers

New research has revealed that the Zika virus breaks into brain cells by using a special molecular key, and scientists think the virus could be tweaked so that it infects only brain [cancer](#) cells, leaving healthy cells unharmed.

The aggressive [brain cancer](#) glioblastoma often [defies standard cancer treatment](#) because the disease transforms normal brain cells into [stem cells](#). While typical neurons stop dividing after so many replications, stem cells can reproduce indefinitely and grow a whole new tumor from just a handful of cells.

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But where standard treatments fail, the Zika virus may offer a new strategy to wipe out the deadly disease, according to a pair of studies published Jan. 16 in the journals [Cell Reports](#) and [Cell Stem Cell](#).

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Other deadly viruses could also serve as weapons against brain cancer. In a study published in 2018 in [The New England Journal of Medicine](#), researchers treated glioblastoma patients with a genetically modified poliovirus and found that more than 20% remained alive three years later, as compared with 4 percent of patients who received a standard treatment, [Live Science reported at the time](#). As the field of [virotherapy](#) continues to grow, once-deadly diseases may prove to be powerful weapons in the fight against cancer.

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