The ethics of Zika
Exploring the questions around the outbreak
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Background
When the Zika virus infects pregnant women, there is an increased chance their baby will be born with a disability called Congenital Zika Syndrome (CZS). Zika is an ethically complex disease, since it mainly affects fetuses, but there has been very little literature analysing the ethics of Zika.

Zika also exemplifies a philosophical idea called the non-identity problem. One way to reduce the incidence of CZS is for women to use contraception to delay their pregnancy while they are at risk of being infected with Zika. Unlike other interventions, contraception prevents CZS in a baby by preventing that baby from existing at all, since a different baby is born later instead. The non-identity problem asks if there is a relevant moral difference between these two types of interventions.

Aims
To explore the ethical issues raised by Zika, and suggest ways forward where possible based on empirical and ethical analysis.

Methods – empirical and ethical aspects
Ethical analysis: Reviewed literature, critically appraised arguments and made suggestions on how to tackle the outbreak.
Finding from these two aspects were compared to give each other context.

Results – Empirical analysis
The survey gathered 98 valid responses from the North American general public. Participants clearly preferred some interventions over others. Participants favoured interventions that did not change babies’ identity.

Results – Ethical analysis
Areas discussed:
- Proportionality in public health
- Surveillance and consent
- Resource allocation
- Quarantine
- Mass gatherings and travel
- Screening cut-offs
- Novel interventions
- The non-identity problem
- Termination of pregnancy
- Genetically modified mosquitos

Conclusions
- Screening tools should be more specific rather than sensitive to avoid excess strain on healthcare systems
- Empirical risk analysis should inform public health advice for mass gathering events like the Olympics
- Contraception should not be ruled out as an intervention because of the non-identity problem
- Abortions should be made accessible for those at risk of CZS
- Genetically modified mosquitos should be used, but need to be monitored for human and ecological harms