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Scientists to test whether Zika can kill brain cancer cells

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Scientists in Britain are planning to harness the Zika virus to try to kill brain tumour cells in experiments that could lead to new ways to fight an aggressive type of cancer.

The research will focus on glioblastoma, the most common form of brain cancer, which has a five-year survival rate of barely 5 per cent.

In glioblastoma, the cancer cells are similar to those in the developing brain, suggesting that the virus could be used to target them while sparing normal adult brain tissue.

Researchers led by Harry Bulstrode at Cambridge University will use tumour cells in the lab and in mice to assess Zika's potential.

"Zika virus infection in babies and children is a major global health concern, and the focus has been to discover more about the virus to find new possible treatments," Bulstrode said in a statement.

"We're taking a different approach, and want to use these new insights to see if the virus can be unleashed against one of the hardest-to-treat cancers."