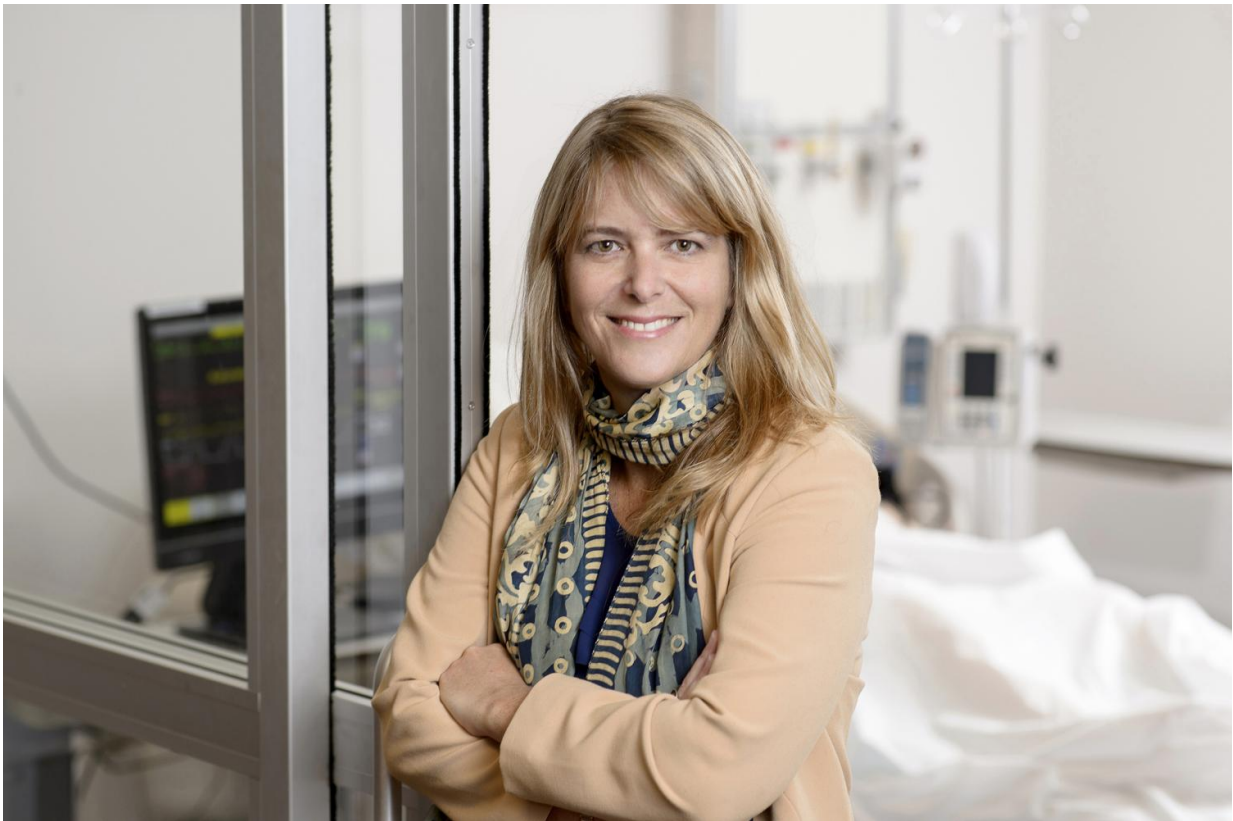


# Historian on Zika's ethical, moral and social complexity for women

June 28 2016, by Amy Patterson Neubert

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Wendy Kline

The Zika virus, like Ebola and other public health issues before it, bring up a variety of complex issues for women, says a Purdue University expert who studies the history of medicine and women's health.

"The public reaction and recommendations related to the Zika virus and how it relates to women's issues – abstaining from sex and delaying pregnancy, self-blame if a child is born deformed, special needs for the affected children and fear around the disease in general – will have long-term implications for women's [health](#)," says Wendy Kline, the Dema G. Seelye Chair in the History of Medicine. "People are refraining from pregnancy, and that raises interesting questions about reproductive health and choice because some of the affected countries are not providing reasonable options other than the suggestion of abstinence. It's not so black and white when financial, social, religious and cultural aspects are involved."

Kline, who also is the author of "Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom" and "Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women's Health in the Second Wave," compares some of today's women's health issues to those that came up with the German measles in the 1960s.

"Zika is a complex issue because we are not asking women to protect their own health, but that of a child," Kline says. "The German measles vaccine also was to protect future fetuses—the next generation—rather than the individual's body, and this raises different public health questions and consequences for [women](#)'s issues. Because there was concern about babies being born with defects from German measles, people were more supportive of the right to abort."

And in more recent history, Kline says the fear and anxiety around Zika are similar to what people experienced with the Ebola virus.

"With Ebola we saw how people fear the unknown and the outsider, and the Zika virus is tapping into some similar anxiety," Klein says. "There is [fear](#) of it spreading, and people then become fearful of living in a global

climate."

Provided by Purdue University

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