



Response to Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions on COVID-19 Vaccines

DIOCESE of ARLINGTON

GUIDELINES FOR CLERGY AND LAY FAITHFUL

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What vaccines are currently available in the United States?

- At the time of this revision (March 2, 2021), the Food and Drug Administration has given approval for the emergency use of the COVID-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. Several other vaccines are in development that have not yet been approved, such as one from AstraZeneca.

Weren't all these vaccines created using cells from aborted fetuses?

- Regarding the use of cells derived from aborted fetuses, the vaccines can be divided into three groups:
- Some COVID-19 vaccines have not used abortion-derived cell lines in any phase of design, manufacture or testing, such as the one in process with the Israel Institute for Biological Research (IIBR). However, such vaccines are not available at this time.
- Others (including the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines) do not use abortion-derived cell lines in the manufacturing process but did employ an abortion-derived cell line at one point in their development (e.g., to test the vaccine).
- A third group of vaccines (including the Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca vaccines) used abortion-derived cell lines in multiple phases of development, including in the manufacturing phase.

What is an abortion-derived cell line?

- The making of a COVID-19 vaccine does not involve taking cells directly from an aborted child's body. Instead, the cells are taken from a cell line. The cell line (HEK 293) used by the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines originated from kidney cells taken from the body of a child aborted in the Netherlands in 1972. The HEK 293 cells are able to be reproduced repeatedly and indefinitely. Their continued use by researchers is an ongoing evil. However, the development of the various COVID-19 vaccines does not require more abortions.

Is it morally permissible to receive these vaccines?

- The Vatican clarified in 2005, 2008, 2017, and again in 2020 that the reception of such vaccines is morally licit. The clarifications can be summarized in this way: for a serious reason, a person may receive a vaccine made from material of illicit origin (e.g., an abortion). No moral evil is committed by a person who never intended for the material to be obtained illicitly, but then receives the vaccine for a serious reason. The one receiving the vaccine has no causal connection to the original act. This does not mean that there is not a grave concern raised by companies obtaining and using the illicit material. For this reason, the Church also instructs us that though one may morally receive the vaccine for a serious reason, one also has the obligation to object to the continued use of illicitly-derived material derived and to request such companies to end these practices.

Doesn't receiving vaccines that make use of fetal cell lines give approval to abortion?

- Knowing the origin of the cell lines does not mean that one *intended or wanted* the abortion to occur that enabled the cell lines. By getting inoculated, a recipient does not necessarily approve of or intend the original abortion, materially contribute to it, or expect it to lead to more abortions. Therefore, a Catholic may in good conscience receive one of the currently available vaccines (i.e., Pfizer or Moderna) in order to prevent disease and save lives.

If I choose to receive the vaccine, does it make a difference which one?

- If one is faced with a choice of multiple COVID-19 vaccines of similar or equal safety and efficacy, as appears likely in the future, the Church counsels the use of the alternative with the better ethical profile, i.e., the alternative that is either not associated with, or less associated with, material derived from abortions.

- As of this writing, the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are less associated with material derived from abortions than the Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca vaccines, and thus would be morally preferable to receive. If a vaccine became available (like the one produced in Israel) that has no connection to abortion-derived cells, then that vaccine would be morally preferable.

Why are the Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca vaccine morally problematic?

- The Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca vaccines used cell lines from previous abortions in the design, production, development, and confirmatory testing. These vaccines may be received only if there are no alternatives. If one does not have a choice of vaccine and a delay in immunization may bring about serious consequences for one's health and the health of others, it would be permissible to accept the Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca vaccines. It is somewhat similar in production to the rubella vaccine, which the Pontifical Academy of Life indicated could be received for grave reasons and if there are no alternatives.

Where is there information on COVID-19 vaccine safety profiles and side effects?

- One can find information at the CDC here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines.html>.

How can I advocate for ethical research that respects the dignity of human life?

- It is a moral good to advocate for more ethical research and pharmaceutical development. There are two basic ways one can advocate for ethical research that respects the dignity of human life:
- Voicing one's moral objections to organizations (like pharmaceutical companies) responsible for the ongoing use of abortion-derived cell lines.
- Supporting research endeavors that seek to develop ethical alternatives to abortion-derived materials in research.

How can I express my concern in writing?

- Although it is morally licit to receive the vaccines in certain circumstances, we still have an obligation to protest the use of morally compromised cell lines in their development and manufacturing. To do so, you can send a letter to the manufacturers expressing your objections and making known the need for ethically acceptable research and development. A template for such a letter can be found here: <http://www.cathmed.org/vaccine-letter-in-objection/>.

I understand your answers, but I still cannot in good conscience get the vaccine. What should I do?

- Some individuals may decline any vaccine that uses abortion-derived cell lines in one or more phases of development or production. Such a decision can be made in good conscience. Such individuals, must also take care to protect their own health and that of others as much as possible. Individuals and groups can band together to create petitions or engage in fundraising to facilitate the creation of alternatives.

Can individuals be compelled to receive a COVID-19 vaccination in Virginia?

- Currently the Commonwealth of Virginia is not mandating reception of the vaccine. If the Commonwealth did move in that direction legislatively, we would voice our objections and advocate for a conscience exemption, such as the Commonwealth currently makes available for other vaccines (e.g., measles, mumps and rubella). As the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has clarified, "vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and ... therefore, it must be voluntary."

Where can I read more on this subject?

- Instruction on Certain Bioethical Questions (Dignitas Personae), Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2008. Link: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html
- Moral Considerations Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines, USCCB, 2021. Link: <https://www.usccb.org/moral-considerations-covid-vaccines>
- "Points to Consider on the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines," The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC), Dec 8, 2020. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e3ada1a6a2e8d6a131d1dcd/>

ENDNOTES

1. Some answers utilized from <https://www.cacatholic.org/CCC-vaccine-moral-acceptability>; <https://faithmag.com/bishops-statement-covid-vaccine>; <https://www.scd.org/news/covid-faq>; <https://dioceseofspokane.org/advocate-for-ethical-research>
2. <https://lozierinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/COVID-19-Vaccine-Candidates-and-Abortion-Derived-Cell-Lines.pdf>
3. <https://www.scd.org/news/covid-faq>
4. <https://lozierinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/COVID-19-Vaccine-Candidates-and-Abortion-Derived-Cell-Lines.pdf>
5. The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC), "Points to Consider on the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines," Dec 8, 2020, p. 5. Link: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e3ada1a6a2e8d6a131d1dcd/t/5fd3ce39e679895094dd1e49/1607716409962/NCBCVaccineStatementFINAL.pdf>
6. Moral Considerations Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines, USCCB, 2021. Link: <https://www.usccb.org/moral-considerations-covid-vaccines>
7. <http://www.academyforlife.va/content/pav/en/the-academy/activity-academy/note-vaccini.html>; https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html
8. "Making Sense of Bioethics:185," Father Tad Pacholczyk, The National Catholic Bioethics Center, November 2020. Link: <https://www.ncbcenter.org/making-sense-of-bioethics-cms/column185-must-catholics-refuse-a-covid-19-vaccine-made-with-a-cell-line-from-an-abortion>
9. "Moral Considerations Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines," USCCB, 2021. Link: <https://www.usccb.org/moral-considerations-covid-vaccines>
10. "Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Fetuses," National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly, 2005
11. "Points to Consider on the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines," The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC), Dec 8, 2020, p. 5. Link: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e3ada1a6a2e8d6a131d1dcd/t/5fd3ce39e679895094dd1e49/1607716409962/NCBCVaccineStatementFINAL.pdf>
12. <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title12/agency5/chapter110/section80/>
13. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html

