

COVID-19 VACCINE FAQs

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS

Q. Why would someone receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

A. According to a December 14, 2020 statement^[1] from the chairmen of the U.S. bishops' doctrine and pro-life committees, "receiving the COVID-19 vaccine ought to be understood as an act of charity toward the other members of our community. In this way, being vaccinated safely against COVID-19 should be considered an act of love of our neighbor and part of our moral responsibility for the common good."

Additionally, as stated^[2] by Dr. Andrea Arcangeli, the director of the Vatican health service, "Only through a widespread and capillary immunization of the population will it be possible to obtain real advantages in terms of public health to achieve control of the pandemic."

Q. What vaccines are currently or may be available for COVID-19?

A. Vaccines are either currently available or likely will be made available in the near future by Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca.^[1] Others are in development, but recent discussion has focused on these three offerings.

Q. Is there any connection between these vaccines and abortion?

A. The chairmen of the U.S. bishops' doctrine and pro-life committees describe the connection as follows: "Neither Pfizer nor Moderna used morally compromised cell lines in the design, development, or production of the vaccine. A confirmatory test, however, employing the commonly used, but morally compromised HEK293 cell line was performed on both vaccines. Thus, while neither vaccine is completely free from any connection to morally compromised cell lines, in this case the connection is very remote from the initial evil of the abortion."

The statement further places into context how the HEK293 cell line is morally compromised, via the following footnote: "The cell line involved in the three new COVID-19 vaccines, a cell line known as HEK293, has its origin in kidney cells taken from the body of a child aborted in the Netherlands in 1972."

The statement continues, "The AstraZeneca vaccine is more morally compromised. The HEK293 cell line was used in the design, development, and production stages of that vaccine, as well as for confirmatory testing."

Similar information on other vaccines currently in development is discussed in an article Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk, "Must Catholics refuse a COVID-19 vaccine made with a cell line from an abortion?" published on TheCatholicSpirit.com December 10, 2020.^[3]

Q. Is it morally acceptable to receive the COVID-19 vaccine? If so, why?

A. As noted in December 21, 2020 a statement^[4] from the Vatican regarding the morality of using the COVID-19 vaccines, "when ethically irreproachable COVID-19 vaccines are not available (e.g. in countries where vaccines without ethical problems are not made available to physicians and patients, or where their distribution is more difficult due to special storage and transport conditions, or when various types of vaccines are distributed in the same country but health authorities do not allow citizens to choose the vaccine with which to be inoculated) *it is morally acceptable to receive COVID-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process.*

"The fundamental reason for considering the use of these vaccines morally licit is that the kind of cooperation in evil (passive material cooperation) in the procured abortion from which these cell lines originate is, on the part of those making use of the resulting vaccines, remote. The moral duty to avoid such passive material cooperation is not obligatory if there is a grave danger, such as the otherwise uncontainable spread of a serious pathological agent^[5] --in this case, the pandemic spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19."

The chairmen of the U.S. bishops' doctrine and pro-life committees specify,¹ "In view of the gravity of the current pandemic and the lack of availability of alternative vaccines, the reasons to accept the new COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna are sufficiently serious to justify their use, despite their remote connection to morally compromised cell lines."

However, the chairmen add, "The AstraZeneca vaccine should be avoided if there are alternatives available."

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Q. Does receiving the COVID-19 vaccine mean accepting or even supporting use of morally problematic cells in medicine?

A. The statement^[4] from the Vatican points out, “all vaccinations recognized as clinically safe and effective can be used in good conscience with *the certain knowledge that the use of such vaccines does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion* from which the cells used in production of the vaccines derive. It should be emphasized, however, that the morally licit use of these types of vaccines, in the particular conditions that make it so, does not in itself constitute a legitimation, even indirect, of the practice of abortion, and necessarily assumes the opposition to this practice by those who make use of these vaccines.”

Q. Is the vaccine effective?

A. Both the Vatican statement and the statement by the chairmen of the U.S. bishops’ doctrine and pro-life committees explain that questions of the efficacy of the vaccines must be addressed by those in the medical community.

The Vatican^[4] notes, “We do not intend to judge the safety and efficacy of these vaccines, although ethically relevant and necessary, as this evaluation is the responsibility of biomedical researchers and drug agencies.”

The chairmen’s statement^[1] includes the following: “Nothing in this document is intended to express any opinion as to the safety or efficacy of any vaccine in general or in any particular case.”

Q. Is it a moral obligation to receive the vaccine?

A. The December 21 statement^[4] from the Vatican explains that “practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary. In any case, from the ethical point of view, *the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one’s own health, but also on the duty to pursue the common good*. In the absence of other means to stop or even prevent the epidemic, the common good may recommend vaccination, especially to protect the weakest and most exposed. Those who, however, for reasons of conscience, refuse vaccines produced with cell lines from aborted fetuses, must do their utmost to avoid, by other prophylactic means and appropriate behavior, becoming vehicles for the transmission of the infectious agent. In particular, they must avoid any risk to the health of those who cannot be vaccinated for medical or other reasons, and who are the most vulnerable.”

Q. How can I learn more about this issue?

A. Find information and actions of the U.S. Bishops in promoting ethical vaccines on the USCCB website^[6]. Additionally, the National Catholic Bioethics Center (ncbcenter.org) addresses vaccines and other issues pertaining to the promotion of human dignity in health care and the life sciences.

[1] Chairmen of the Committee on Doctrine and the Committee on Pro-Life Activities United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. “Moral Considerations Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines.” December 11, 2020. <https://www.usccb.org/moral-considerations-covid-vaccines>

[2] Wooden, Cindy. “Vatican will offer Pfizer vaccine against COVID-19 to employees.” December 11, 2020. <https://thecatholicspirit.com/news/nation-and-world/vatican-will-offer-pfizer-vaccine-against-covid-19-to-employees/>

[3] Pacholczyk, Father Tad. “Must Catholics refuse a COVID-19 vaccine made with a cell line from an abortion?” TheCatholicSpirit.com. Accessed December 10, 2020. <https://thecatholicspirit.com/commentary/making-sense-out-of-bioethics/must-catholics-refuse-a-covid-19-vaccine-made-with-a-cell-line-from-an-abortion/>

[4] Holy See Press Office. “Note on the morality of using some anti- COVID-19 vaccines.” December 21, 2020. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/12/21/0681/01591.html#ing>

[5] Cited as [3] in the above statement by the Holy See Press Office: Cfr. Pontifical Academy for Life, “Moral reflections on vaccines prepared from cells derived from aborted human fetuses,” June 5, 2005.

[6] Moral Guidance on Vaccines – USCCB.org. Accessed December 21, 2020. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/moral-guidance-vaccines>