



*Office of Archbishop Alexander Sample*

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2021 has arrived with the rollout of new vaccines to prevent COVID-19 and the hope of ending the pandemic sometime this year. Thanks be to God, who has heard our pleas for relief.

With the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines, moral questions have arisen for Catholics about receiving them. Both the Vatican and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have issued statements providing moral guidance on reception of the vaccines.

The brief Vatican statement, issued through the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) on December 21, 2020, makes several important determinations and observations. In its evaluation, reception of the currently developed vaccines is deemed morally permissible. The USCCB statement, which cited previous Vatican statements on vaccination, reached the same ethical conclusion.

The question of moral permissibility arises because the vaccines currently in use each have some connection with abortion. In the case of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the connection is very remote. The development and production of the vaccines is not tainted, but a confirmatory test for both vaccines utilized a morally compromised cell line. In the case of the AstraZeneca vaccine, an aborted fetal cell line is used in its production. Because the connection is less remote, this vaccine raises greater concern. The danger and gravity of the pandemic provide sufficient reason to deem its reception morally permissible when no other vaccine is readily available. A Catholic, in good conscience, may receive any of the current COVID-19 vaccines, although preference should be given to the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines if available, due to their much more remote connection with morally compromised cell lines. Use of the vaccines does not constitute endorsement of abortion on the part of the Church. We all have an obligation to urge pharmaceutical companies and biomedical researchers to avoid using morally compromised cell lines.

The Vatican reminds Catholics that, “vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation,” and it “must be voluntary.” Individuals must follow their consciences on the matter. However, they must consider their own health and the common good of the public when weighing the morality of vaccination. Those who choose not to get vaccinated must take practical measures not to place other people at risk, especially those vulnerable to the virus. Reception of the vaccine can be viewed as an act of charity for others, especially when it is received by those less susceptible to the virus and its effects.

Keep in mind that some people may choose not to receive the vaccine due to medical or other concerns. The vaccines in use here in the United States have not yet received full and formal approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, but they have received conditional approval for emergency use. The safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines is not within the

competence of the Church to determine. Catholics must rely on health officials and other experts to evaluate whether a particular vaccine is safe and efficacious.

I will not be in the first categories of people to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, but I plan to take it when it becomes more generally available. Each person who receives the vaccine brings us closer to the threshold needed to reach community immunity. Achieving the vaccination rates to reach community immunity will likely take us well into 2021 and will depend on many factors. In the meantime, we will continue to practice social distancing, wearing masks, washing hands and cleaning commonly used surfaces.

We continue to hope and pray fervently for a speedy end to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we trust in the Lord's providence to see us through. We give thanks to God for the health care professionals, first responders, and all who have made sacrifices to help us through these trying times. May God bless each of you, your families and communities throughout 2021.

Additional Resources:

Vatican Statement on COVID-19 Vaccines: [CDF Statement](#)

USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities: [Answers to Key Ethical Questions About COVID-19 Vaccines](#) (en español)

USCCB Statement: [moral-considerations-covid-vaccines \(usccb.org\)](#) (en español)