

## Ethics of COVID-19 Vaccines

Sts. Simon and Jude Parish

West Chester, PA

December 17, 2020

### NCBC Intro

The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC) is a health care and life-sciences ‘think-tank’ located in Philadelphia, PA. Founded in 1972, the NCBC’s mission is to promote and safeguard the dignity of the human person from conception to natural death and it adheres to the moral teachings of the Catholic Church—particularly as articulated in the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services* (6<sup>th</sup> edition, USCCB, 2018). The NCBC shares in the ministry of Jesus Christ and his Church by helping people to both understand and apply Church teachings in the areas of health care and the life-sciences. This is accomplished primarily through consultation, education, and publication. The NCBC has a staff of 18, including 6 full-time and 2 part-time ethicists.

### Contact information

- Website: [ncbcenter.org](http://ncbcenter.org)
- Phone: 215-877-2660
- Joe Zalot, Ph.D., Staff Ethicist – [jonalot@ncbcenter.org](mailto:jonalot@ncbcenter.org) or 215-871-2014

### NCBC’s primary activities:

1. Consults, both individual (free) and institutional
  - a. Ethicist available 24/7, 365
  - b. Individual consults (+/-1500 per year)
    - 1) Phone: 215-877-2660
    - 2) [ncbcenter.org](http://ncbcenter.org) => “Ask a Question” ([link](#))
  - c. Institutional consults – mergers
2. Education
  - a. Bishops’ Workshop – Biannual event, educate US, Caribbean, and Latin American bishops on contemporary issues in health care ethics and life sciences.
  - b. Certification program ([link](#)) – 12 months, can get graduate credit at (1) University of Mary in North Dakota, or (2) Holy Apostles College & Seminary in Connecticut
  - c. Two-Day seminars – nationwide ([link](#))
  - d. Issues in health care and bioethics – “Resources” section of website => “Topics in Catholic Bioethics” ([link](#))
  - e. Podcast – “Bioethics on Air” ([link](#))
  - f. “Bioethics Public Policy Review” – bi-weekly summary of national and international new stories impacting Catholic health care ([link](#))
  - g. Ethicists available for presentations and interviews nationwide
3. Publications
  - a. *Catholic Health Care Ethics: A Manual for Practitioners* – 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2020 ([link](#))
  - b. *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* – academic journal
  - c. *Ethics & Medics* – monthly, popular articles

- d. Books and Guides ([NCBC store](#))
  - 1) “A Catholic Guide to EOL Decision Making” (Spanish) – includes health care proxy and advance medical directives forms
  - 2) “A Catholic Guide to Palliative Care and Hospice,” w/questions
  - 3) Forthcoming – “A Catholic Guide to POLST”
  - 4) Forthcoming – “A Catholic Guide to Assisted Reproductive Technologies”

### **Ethics of COVID-19 Vaccines**

1. Abortion derived cell lines (ADCLs)
  - a. ADCLs are “created” from the organs or tissue of children who were voluntarily aborted. Cells were taken from the aborted child and then replicated many times over to create “immortal” cell lines.
  - b. ADCLs are different from human embryonic stem cells (ESC). ADCLs use cells taken from abortions, ESC are taken from an early stage human embryo (through the IVF process) causing the embryo’s death.
  - c. Examples of ADCLs: WI-38 (1962), MRC-5 (1966), HEK-293 (1972), PER-C6 (1995), Walvax-2 (2015)
  - d. Pediatric/other vaccines that use ADCLs – Sound Choice Pharmaceutical, “Vaccine Card” ([link](#))
2. Catholic teaching regarding vaccines that use ADCLs
  - a. “Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Fetuses,” Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV) – 2005 ([link](#))
    - 1) Question: “Is it permissible to accept a vaccine that uses ADCLs in its development and/or production?”
    - 2) PAV response: Yes. Assuming there are no other available options, it is permissible to accept such a vaccine because (1) the vaccine protects against a disease that poses a very serious health concern to both individuals and society (as such, it offers a great good to society), and (2) any cooperation in the evil of abortion is very remote.
  - b. *Dignitas Personae*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – 2008 ([link](#))
    - 1) “Grave reasons may be morally proportionate to justify the use of such ‘biological material’ [ADCLs]. Thus, for example, danger to the health of children could permit parents to use a vaccine which was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, while keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available.” (n. 35)
    - 2) “Make known disagreement” – Children of God for Life ([link](#)) => Take Action => Voice Your Complaints
  - c. “Note on the Italian Vaccine Issue,” Pontifical Academy for Life – 2017 ([link](#))
    - 1) “The technical characteristics of the production of the vaccines most commonly used in childhood lead us to exclude that there is a morally relevant cooperation between those who use these vaccines today and the practice of voluntary abortion. Hence, we believe that all clinically recommended vaccinations can be used with a clear conscience and that the use of such vaccines does not signify some sort of cooperation with voluntary abortion.”

- 2) “In the context of the shared commitment to ensure that every vaccine is free of any connection to biological material derived from abortion in terms of its preparation, we reiterate the moral responsibility of vaccination in order to avoid serious health risks for children and the general population.”
3. NCBC classification of COVID-19 vaccines (soon) available for public use. See Charlotte Lozier Institute’s “COVID-19 Vaccine Candidates and Abortion-Derived Cell Lines” ([link](#))
  - Group 1: Vaccines that do not use ADFCLs in any phase of development, manufacture, or testing.
  - Group 2: Vaccines that do not use ADCLs in the manufacturing process, but used them at some point in the development (widely understood) process, such as (indirect) confirmatory testing. Examples: Moderna and Pfizer/BioNtech.
  - Group 3: Vaccines that use ADCLs in development, manufacturing, and/or testing. Examples: AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson (Janssen).
4. Can a Catholic accept a COVID-19 vaccine that used ADCLs in development and/or production?
  - a. Yes ... if (1) there is a proportionately serious reason for accepting the vaccine due to one’s life circumstances, and (2) there is no less ethically-problematic alternative vaccine available.
  - b. Overall, one should accept a COVID-19 vaccine from ...
    - 1) Group 1 first (none presently available)
    - 2) Group 2 (Moderna, Pfizer), if none in group 1 are available
    - 3) Group 3 (AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson), if none in groups 1 and 2 are available
  - c. Can one refuse a COVID-19 vaccine?
    - 1) Yes, there is no moral *obligation* to vaccinate. One can refuse a COVID-19 vaccine on grounds of conscience, that it used ADCLs in the development and/or manufacturing process. One can also refuse on the grounds that COVID-19 vaccines are experimental (safety and effectiveness concerns).
    - 2) If one refuses the COVID-19 vaccine, one has a duty to take every reasonable precaution so as to not spread the virus to others. One will have to mask and physically distance. One may also not be able to visit sick or at-risk relatives, enroll children in school, travel, etc.
5. Resources
  - a. “Moral Considerations Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committees on Doctrine and Pro-life Activities, December 14, 2020 ([link](#))
  - b. “Points to Consider on the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines,” NCBC Statement, December 8, 2020 ([link](#))
  - c. NCBC “Bioethics on Air” podcasts
    - Episode 42: “Moderna’s COVID-19 Vaccine – Is it Ethical?” ([link](#))
    - Episode 43: “Further Perspectives on COVID-19 Vaccines” ([link](#))

Free-will donation: [ncbcenter.org/donate](https://ncbcenter.org/donate)

Questions, comments, discussion ...