



## **COVID-19 Vaccines**

At an unprecedented speed, due to the almost unlimited human and financial resources dedicated to this global collaborative project, we are fortunate to see three vaccines emerge from a scrupulously conducted human research process, but one done at warp speed, to combat the novel coronavirus responsible for the global pandemic that swept the world in 2019-2020 and that continues into 2021. Behind these three medications/vaccines are almost three dozen other products that are moving quickly through the same required phases of global clinical research. Please see Appendix A for information on current US vaccine efforts., which includes designation of those that are considered ethically controversial in their development as well as those considered ethically uncontroversial.

Because of the urgent need to produce, distribute and administer vaccinations essentially to the world's entire population, the ability to express and act on a preference for one product over another based on ethical concerns, while perhaps desired by some communities or individuals, is not always possible to bring about, and in most cases is probably impossible.

In advance of the availability of any of these products the Church, through multiple sources of its teaching, has addressed the moral concerns of those who will be vaccinated and those who will provide the vaccinations, including healthcare professionals, healthcare facilities and healthcare systems.

While it is not always the case that the resources dedicated to dissemination and explication of Church teaching are consistent and clear on all topics, it is very helpful to all involved constituencies that in the case of the vaccines produced in response to the novel coronavirus known as COVID-19 that has impacted the world, the main sources of Church teaching on vaccines are all in complete

synchronicity: the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), building on recent teaching about vaccines generally first articulated in 2005 by the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV), reiterated by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in its instruction ‘*Dignitas Personae*’ in 2008, as well as a follow up to its earlier statement from the Pontifical Academy for Life in 2017, has issued a note signed by the Prefect, Cardinal Luis Ladaria, the text of which was approved by Pope Francis on December 17, 2020. Helpfully, each document refers to that which preceded it, thus reinforcing the same moral analysis and reasoning which makes it simpler for those trying to assimilate Church teaching in 2021 as it applies to the new COVID vaccines.

In the US, our primary source of Catholic teaching and its application – the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) – issued a memo in December 2020, that also echo the sources used by the Vatican, addressing the moral status of the vaccines, as well as the positive obligation to save lives and protect/promote the common good. Dated December 20, 2020 (see Resources below), the Bishops summarized the relevant teaching specific to the COVID-19 vaccines:

*Neither the Pfizer nor the Moderna vaccine involved the use of cell lines that originated in fetal tissue taken from the body of an aborted baby at any level of design, development, or production. They are not completely free from any connection to abortion, however, as both Pfizer and Moderna made use of a tainted cell line for one of the confirmatory lab tests of their products. There is thus a connection, but it is relatively remote.*

*Some are asserting that if a vaccine is connected in any way with tainted cell lines then it is immoral to be vaccinated with them. This is an inaccurate portrayal of Catholic moral teaching.*

Referring to the earlier documents mentioned above in para 4, and using the reasoning from them, the bishops’ Chairs of the Doctrine and Pro-Life Committees clarify that, while it is immoral to use tissue taken from an aborted baby to create cell lines, there are different kinds of moral responsibility for those who design the vaccine to those who produce the vaccine to those who receive the vaccine. Specifically, in *Dignitas Personae*, we read that, “in organizations where cell lines of illicit origin are being utilized, the responsibility of those who make the decision to use them is not the same as those who have no voice in such a decision.”

In its statement recently, the CDF’s Note on the morality of using some anti-COVID-19 vaccines states:

*“when ethically irreproachable COVID-19 vaccines are not available, [it is] morally acceptable to receive COVID-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process.”*

Citing the Pontifical Academy’s 2005 document which looked more generally at vaccines, and specifically used the example of vaccinations to prevent rubella with all of its dangerous outcomes for the *in utero* development of babies, the bishops write:

*The Pontifical Academy for Life gives as an example the case of rubella (German measles): “We find, in such a case, a proportional reason, in order to accept the use of these vaccines in the presence of the danger of favouring the spread of the pathological agent, due to the lack of vaccination of children. This is particularly true in the case of vaccination against German measles.” Pontifical Academy for Life, “Moral Reflections on Vaccines,” 2005 [NB: from the CDC: Pregnant women who contract rubella are at risk for miscarriage or stillbirth, and their developing babies are at risk for severe birth defects with devastating lifelong consequences.]*

This reasoning applies in the case of the highly contagious coronavirus which has resulted in transmission that brought it to the level of a global pandemic and, as importantly or more so, is unpredictable in terms of who will be most severely impacted by getting it: while many experience the virus as a mild flu or cold, some even asymptotically, others are sick to the point of death, and many more are afflicted with lingering sequelae that lead to chronic conditions. In all, COVID-19 poses a grim threat to public health and to the common good.

Because of the ongoing, at this time uncontrolled/uncontrollable nature of the illness, the CDF in its December 17, 2020 note states that, “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 the production of the vaccines derive.” Rather, the Congregation says, receiving the vaccine is morally permissible, because the cooperation of the vaccine recipient is so ‘remote’ that ‘the moral duty to avoid such passive material cooperation is not obligatory’ because there exists a grave danger in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The PAV is more nuanced in its explication of the moral reasoning that not only justifies the acceptance of ‘slightly tainted’ vaccines but goes even further in couching that analysis as a rationale for seeing vaccination as almost an obligation.

PAV referred to these preparatory techniques by ruling out “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. While the commitment to ensuring that every vaccine has no connection in its preparation to any material originating from an abortion, *the moral responsibility to vaccinate is reiterated in order to avoid serious health risks for children and the general population.*

Finally, in a paper written in collaboration with the Vatican Commission on Vaccination, the Pontifical Academy for Life continues the theme of obligatory vaccination from a social justice perspective and addresses the need, the obligation, to guarantee access to and availability of vaccine for those too often forgotten or overlooked. Just as the social disparities of health have been spotlighted in our own communities by this pandemic, so have they across the globe, and PAV makes a point to stress the duty we have to make sure that the forgotten are remembered and are included in the delivery of preventive measures like vaccines, as well as the treatments for COVID-19 when they are available.

## RESOURCES

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/memo-to-bishops-on-vaccines-for-covid-19.pdf>

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20201221\\_nota-vaccini-anticovid\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html)

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-12/vatican-cdf-note-covid-vaccine-morality-abortion.html>

[http://www.academyforlife.va/content/dam/pav/documenti%20pdf/2020/Covid\\_Accademia\\_IHD\\_22dicembre/28.12.20\\_ENG\\_VACCINE%20DPIHD%20PAL\\_Updated.pdf](http://www.academyforlife.va/content/dam/pav/documenti%20pdf/2020/Covid_Accademia_IHD_22dicembre/28.12.20_ENG_VACCINE%20DPIHD%20PAL_Updated.pdf)

## APPENDIX B

### **Analysis of COVID-19 Vaccine Candidates**

Includes vaccine candidates that received “Operation Warp Speed” funding or have been submitted to the FDA for emergency use approval

See here for a chart of all vaccines being tested and more detailed information about each:

<https://s27589.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/COVID-19-Vaccine-Candidates-and-Abortion-Derived-Cell-Lines.pdf>

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## Analysis of COVID-19 Vaccine Candidates

Includes vaccine candidates that received "Operation Warp Speed" funding or have been submitted to the FDA for emergency use approval

 Sponsor(s)	 Status	 Development/ Production of Vaccine	 Lab Testing
	Emergency Use FDA Application Approved		
	Emergency Use FDA Application Approved		
	Phase 3 Trials		
	Phase 3 Trials		
	Phase 3 Trials		
	Phase 1/2 Trials		
	Phase 1/2 Trials		
	Phase 1 Trials		

### Key



Does not use abortion-derived cell line



DOES USE abortion-derived cell line



SOME tests DO NOT use abortion-derived cells, SOME DO



Currently undetermined