

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the COVID Vaccines

1. Is it true that some of the COVID-19 vaccines were developed using aborted fetuses?

Presently, thirteen COVID vaccines are in the final stages of being tested, and, two (Pfizer and Moderna) have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Regarding the use of aborted fetuses in the development of the vaccines, the vaccines can be divided into three groups:

A) Some COVID vaccines have not used abortion-derived cell lines in any phase of design, manufacture or testing.

B) Others (including the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines) do not use abortion-derived cell lines in the manufacturing process, but did employ an abortion-derived fetal cell line at one point in its development. (eg., to test the vaccine)

C) A third group of vaccines (including the AstraZeneca vaccine) used abortion-derived cell lines in multiple phases of development, including in the manufacturing phase.¹

2. Is it morally acceptable to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. “In view of the gravity of the current pandemic and lack of alternative vaccines, the reasons to accept the new COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna (Group B) are sufficiently serious to justify their use, despite their remote connection to morally compromised cell lines. [...] In this way, being vaccinated safely against COVID-19 should be considered an act of love and part of our moral responsibility for the common good.”²

3. What is an abortion-derived cell line?

The making of a COVID 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 (HEK293) involved in the Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines originated from kidney cells taken from the body of a child aborted in the Netherlands in 1972. The living cells of HEK 293 are able to be reproduced repeatedly and indefinitely. The development of the vaccine does not demand that more and more cells be taken from more and more abortions.³

4. Are there some vaccines that are more ethical than others?

Yes, there is a clear ethical hierarchy among vaccines. Those vaccines in Group A (above) are the more ethical choice because they do not depend on abortion-derived cell lines in any phase of the design, manufacture or testing. And, vaccines in Group B are preferable to those in Group C. Nonetheless, depending on the circumstances, for grave reasons and in the absence of other alternatives, you can morally choose to use a vaccine

¹ The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC), “Points to Consider on the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines,” Dec 8, 2020, p. 5.

²USCCB Chairmen, “Moral Considerations,” p. 5.

³Chairmen of the Committee on Doctrine and the Committee on Pro-life Activities USCCB, “Moral Considerations Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines,” p. 4.

in Group C to protect your own life and the lives of others.⁴ Furthermore, you may not be given a choice when it comes to which vaccine you would prefer to receive, at least not without a lengthy delay in immunization.⁵

5. Since abortion is always intrinsically evil, am I participating in evil by deciding to receive a Group B or C vaccine (utilizing morally compromised cells) when a Group A vaccine (not morally compromised) is unavailable?

No, you are not participating in evil. “Again, the mere fact that a vaccine may have been tested using these cell lines does not establish a connection between the vaccine recipient and the abortion. Furthermore, simply knowing the origin of the cell lines does not mean that one intends abortion. Thus, a recipient of the vaccine does not approve of or intend the original abortions, or materially contribute to them. Clearly, all that the recipient intends is the preventing of disease and saving lives....The act of receiving the COVID-19 vaccines developed from the cell lines in question does not lead others to procure abortion. The action of the recipient is not the reason why someone has an abortion, nor is it an endorsement of abortion.”⁶ Because of these reasons, making use of the resulting morally compromised vaccines is considered only remote passive material cooperation in evil and therefore morally licit for any recipient of the vaccine.⁷

6. What has the Catholic Church done to promote morality in the development of vaccines and other medical technologies?

Over the last 15 years, the universal Catholic Church has issued several instructions regarding vaccines. These include “Moral Reflections” from the Pontifical Academy for Life (2005), *Dignitatus Personae* (2008) from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the more recent “Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines” from the CDF. In this country, the USCCB has given guidance, as well as the *National Catholic Bioethics Center* and many Catholic conferences. The USCCB has also advocated with the US Food and Drug Administration for the “access to vaccines that are free from any connection to abortion.”⁸ The California Catholic Conference, during the recent election advocated against Proposition 14 funding research on the medical use of embryonic stem cells.⁹

7. What is an example of something that would be more proximate in cooperation in evil?

There are consumer choices made daily that are more proximate in cooperation with an unjust evil than getting a COVID vaccine. For example, almost all mobile devices use

⁴ NCBC, “Points,” pp. 5-6.

⁵ USCCB Chairmen, “Moral Considerations,” p. 6

⁶ California Catholic Conference (CCC), “Catholic Moral Teaching and Tradition on COVID-19 Vaccines,” Dec 2020.

⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), “Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines,” no.3.

⁸ USCCB Chairmen, “Moral Considerations,” p. 2

⁹ https://cacatholic.org/2020_propositions

lithium and cobalt which are often mined in poor countries where the conditions are bad and the workers are poorly treated.¹⁰

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

Some individuals may decide to 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; however, 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.”¹¹

Declining to receive the vaccine is not a free pass to ignore safety protocols set out by public health officials. Individuals must continue to maintain the safe practices that slow the spread of the virus, including wearing a mask, practicing physical distancing, and frequent hand-washing.

9. I plan to get the vaccine. Now what?

“Those who use a vaccine linked to abortion-derived cell lines should do so only ‘under protest’ and should make known their opposition to abortion and to the use of abortion-derived cell lines. Beyond the issue of these cell lines, other significant factors to consider in making a decision include one’s own health needs and underlying conditions, one’s responsibility for the health of others, and relevant requirements in one’s line of work. Of course, everyone must take into account issues of safety, efficacy, and reasonable availability among the vaccine options.”¹²

In order for pharmaceutical companies or lawmakers to change, the market must demand ethical medicines. The faithful may receive the currently available vaccines and peacefully protest by writing directly to these companies and government representatives to make known their opposition to abortion-derived cell lines in any stage of production. Your voice and your votes matter.

Even after receiving the vaccine, individuals must continue to maintain the safe practices that slow the spread of the virus, including wearing a mask, practicing physical distancing, and frequent hand-washing.

10. Should I protect my freedom to do as I see fit during the Pandemic?

Our freedom is a gift from God. Freedom is not for its own sake. True freedom leads us to serve what is good and true. Freedom finds its truest expression in self-sacrifice. Generously making sacrifices for the health and welfare of others is a laudable use of our personal freedom during the pandemic and gives fitting glory to God, whose Son sacrificed himself for our sake.

¹⁰ Fr. Matthew Schneider, LC, “12 Things Less-Remote Cooperation in Evil Than COVID Vaccines” <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/throughcatholiclenses/2020/12/12-things-less-remote-cooperation-in-evil-than-covid-vaccines>

¹¹ NCBC, “Points,” p. 8.

¹² NCBC, Points, p. 6.

11. I'm tired of this pandemic.

The lives that have been lost to this pandemic cannot go unnoticed. We also cannot undermine the feelings of isolation, depression, anxiety or frustration that so many have felt over these many months. As we miss gathering with our family and friends, we also miss being able to gather around the Lord's table as one vibrant community of faithful. Our lives are forever changed by this dreadful virus and we must continue to take the necessary precautions that protect the most vulnerable among us. In this year of St. Joseph—patron of the Universal Church and the domestic church—may his intercession join with our prayers for God's mercy to end this pandemic.

12. Where can I find more information?

- [Points to Consider on the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines \(8 December 2020\) \(National Catholic Bioethics Center\)](#)
- [Moral Considerations Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines \(11 December 2020\) \(USCCB\)](#)
- [Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines \(21 December 2020\) \(Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith\)](#)
- [Catholic Moral Teaching and Tradition on COVID-19 Vaccines \(30 December 2020\) \(California Catholic Conference\)](#)