

A Statement from the Catholic Bishops of North Dakota on the COVID-19 Vaccines and Vaccination

The development of vaccines to help protect people from COVID-19 has brought hope while also raising questions about the vaccines and vaccination.

Guided by the principles of solidarity and the common good, we encourage people to safely and timely vaccinate against COVID-19. Vaccines not only help protect ourselves, but they also help protect others. When vaccinated, we essentially become barriers against further transmission of the virus. This is especially important for those more susceptible to contracting and succumbing to COVID-19, which has most affected the medically vulnerable and disproportionately impacted racial and ethnic minorities.

Some people may have concerns about whether the COVID-19 vaccines are ethically acceptable. Some vaccines are developed, produced, or tested using cell lines that were originally obtained from aborted fetal tissue. The original act of obtaining tissue from an aborted child for research was morally wrong. Nevertheless, we agree with ethicists and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are ethically acceptable because any connection with the use of abortion-derived cells is sufficiently remote. Neither Pfizer nor Moderna use morally compromised cell lines in the production of the vaccine and the vaccines do not contain fetal cells. A Catholic can in good conscience receive either of these vaccines.

Some potential COVID-19 vaccines may have no connection at all, even remotely, with the use of abortion-derived cells. However, those vaccines are still a long way from final approval and distribution, if they ever reach that stage. Waiting for the arrival of a completely ethically pure vaccine may be an heroic act in other circumstances. In this case, however, such waiting is difficult to justify in light of the seriousness of the pandemic, the availability of ethically acceptable vaccines, and our responsibility for the common good.

We also recognize that not every person should get the vaccine or receive it immediately. Every person should decide whether and when to receive the vaccine based on their individual medical circumstances and the need to prioritize distribution of the vaccine.

Finally, although the development and rapid availability of the vaccine is welcome, it is not an immediate solution to the pandemic. Experts estimate that COVID-19 will continue to spread until seventy to eighty percent of the general population has been vaccinated. Reaching this vaccination level will take time and a commitment to the common good. Meanwhile, we should continue practicing social distancing, mask wearing, and other mitigation measures. When such acts are required and properly enacted by legitimate authorities, such laws should be given due respect. When not legally required, we should practice such measures in the spirit of charity for the common good.

With trust in the providence of God, we offer thanks for our health care professionals, scientists, researchers, and public health professionals and pray for wisdom, fortitude, and love for others during these trying times.

December 15, 2020

†Most Reverend David D. Kagan
Bishop of Bismarck

†Most Reverend John T. Folda
Bishop of Fargo