



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER

6399 Drexel Road, Philadelphia, PA 19151 ▪ Tel 215-877-2660 ▪ Fax 215-877-2688 ▪ www.ncbcenter.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The National Catholic Bioethics Center's Press Statement on Vaccines

[PHILADELPHIA, PA, March 11]—The grant of Emergency Use Authorization for the Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine raised controversy because it utilizes abortion-derived cell lines to a greater extent than do the Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines. The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC) highlights the following points:

It is a profound good for people to take steps to protect themselves and the life and health of others from COVID-19. Immunization is one of the most effective ways to do so.

Based on guidance provided by the teaching authority of the Church and sound principles of ethics, each person is called to careful conscientious and prudential discernment in deciding whether to take any COVID-19 vaccine or not.

People should consider many relevant factors in this process of discernment; health vulnerabilities, theirs and those of others at home, at work, or in the community; and other issues like the fact that despite their apparent safety and efficacy, all available vaccines are currently administered under an FDA Emergency Use Authorization because the long-term medical risks of these vaccines will be known only in the future.

The NCBC made a similar distinction to the [statement by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) that affirmed, “If one can choose among equally safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, the vaccine with the least connection to abortion-derived cell lines should be chosen. Therefore, if one has the ability to choose a vaccine, Pfizer or Moderna’s vaccines should be chosen over Johnson & Johnson’s.” This must be weighed with other relevant considerations in conscientious discernment. Please see our [Points to Consider on the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines](#) on our website.

Authoritative guidance provided by the [Church](#) has insisted on the gravely unjust legal situation of the use of biological material of illicit origin like abortion-derived cell lines. Abortion is a heinous crime, and its continued ties to biomedical research is unacceptable and must be changed.

It is clear from Catholic Church guidance that people may discern in conscience to use any of the ethically problematic vaccines offered in the United States, because no good alternatives are available to ones that utilize abortion-derived cell lines in one or more phases of production and testing. No one accepting the vaccines had any meaningful role in the abortions that were exploited to create abortion-derived cell lines. This fact, along with the grave dangers to life and health posed by COVID-19, prompted the [Vatican](#) and [US Bishops](#) to clarify that people may use available vaccines with a clear conscience but with the duty to express their opposition to the use of abortion-derived cell lines and to call for alternatives as quickly as possible. Sample [protest letters](#) are available from the USCCB.

[The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's note on COVID-19 vaccines](#) and the foundational ethical principle of informed consent also makes it clear that receiving these vaccines must be voluntary and is not a moral obligation. People who decline a vaccine should not be pressured to violate their conscientious judgments.

The rapid development and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines is a testament to human ingenuity. We should acknowledge this achievement while demanding fully ethical options. Given the extreme levels of support for abortion, and the widespread acceptance in our society of exploiting the bodies of aborted babies for biomedical research and development, it is critically important to heed *Dignitas personae*'s exhortation to find effective ways to “mobilize consciences in favor of life.”

The National Catholic Bioethics Center provides education, guidance, and resources to the Church and society to uphold the dignity of the human person in health care and biomedical research, thereby sharing in the ministry of Jesus Christ and his Church.

###