



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER

Upholding the Dignity of the Human Person in Health Care and Biomedical Research since 1972

For Immediate Release

April 28, 2022

Media contact: Alison Haas

ahaas@ncbcenter.org tel 313 694-5725

The NCBC Updates Its Statement on COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates to Include Children and Vulnerable Persons

PHILADELPHIA – There are [proposals](#) to approve use of the currently available COVID-19 vaccines for children as young as six-months old and in some places to [require](#) them for school children once full Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval has been given for young age groups. The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC) notes there are distinct ethical issues with decision-making regarding COVID-19 vaccination for children and other persons unable to give informed consent.

The NCBC wishes to highlight the higher threshold of therapeutic benefit that must be applied to medical decisions for any persons at greater risk of exploitation, such as children.

We emphasize the importance of respecting the rightful role of parents or legal representatives in making medical decisions for minors or others incapable of giving their own consent. These decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis with careful weight given to all ethically relevant factors including the potential burdens and benefits. The updated NCBC statement also recalls the higher ethical standards required in medical research, including the need for appreciable direct benefits to research participants themselves as distinct from benefits accruing solely to other people. [Research data](#) strongly suggests that children are the demographic group at lowest risk of harm from COVID-19. Parents and society have a particular duty to protect vulnerable children and others who cannot make their own medical decisions.

Mandating COVID-19 immunization with the currently available vaccines in the absence of generous medical, conscience, and religious exemptions raises ethical concerns, especially when dealing with young populations. Some of these concerns include the potential long-term risks of these new COVID-19 vaccines and limited vaccine follow-up data, and the unknown long-term risks of COVID-19 infection that take on greater weight for children who have a long timeline for living ahead of them.

The full updated statement can be read on the NCBC's [website](#).

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The Mission of The National Catholic Bioethics Center is to provide 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.