



Archdiocese of
Washington

Frequently Asked Questions on the COVID-19 Vaccine

Why is the COVID-19 vaccine controversial?

Many existing vaccines, including the MMR vaccine, use HEK293 cell lines that are descended from two abortions that took place in the 1970s. These cell lines do not contain cells from the original abortions; rather, the lines are distant descendants and clones of the original cells, which were derived from human embryonic kidney tissue. Some of the COVID-19 vaccines use the HEK293 cells in their development and/or testing.

The Archdiocese of Washington supports and affirms the statement published on March 2, 2021 by the USCCB, which states: "given the world-wide suffering that this pandemic is causing, we affirm again that being vaccinated can be an act of charity that serves the common good."

How are the vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer different from the Johnson & Johnson vaccine?

Moderna and Pfizer have developed vaccines using mRNA, and without the use of controversial fetal cell lines. However, both vaccines have been tested using HEK293 cell lines. The Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca vaccines used the HEK293 cell lines in their development, which makes them seem "closer" in origin to the act of abortion.

As a Catholic, can I receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine?

Yes. There is a very remote connection between the act of abortion and the HEK293 cell lines. All COVID-19 vaccines are in line with the moral statements made by the Catholic Church that have been made in the past fifty years. In the event that you are offered a COVID-19 vaccine that is developed from cell lines from abortion (such as the case of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine), a December 2020 statement from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith clarifies that "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."

The coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 500,000 Americans. Therefore, there is great urgency to vaccinate our community and it is morally permissible for all Catholics to take this vaccine in order to protect the lives of those who are most at risk of serious coronavirus. Most people in Maryland and the District of Columbia will not have a choice in what vaccine they receive, and it is morally beneficial for each person to receive the vaccine that is most readily and immediately available to them to expedite the end of this deadly pandemic.

Which vaccine should I receive?

Catholics who are receiving the COVID-19 vaccine in order to protect lives in their families and communities should feel comfortable receiving any vaccine that is available to them. The

USCCB's statement clarifies that each of us should receive the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, if available, because they are more distant from the HEK293 cell lines.

However, given the moral urgency of the vaccination process, Catholics are encouraged to receive any vaccine that will protect their families and communities. Remember that the state of Maryland and the District of Columbia have limited vaccines available therefore, we encourage each member of the Archdiocese of Washington to receive the COVID-19 vaccine that is most readily and easily available. By seeking vaccination, we can help to protect our vulnerable communities from this deadly pandemic.

What can I do to represent my Catholic values on this issue?

As Catholics, we are encouraged to promote the work of companies that are not using these controversial cell lines. Please continue to call pharmaceutical companies directly and ask them not to use these cell lines in future vaccine development. These calls can be an effective strategy as in past movements, especially as technology develops and the HEK293 cell lines become less necessary in vaccine development.

Catholics are also encouraged to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, to continue to wear masks and practice social distancing, and to promote the common good by following the guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Am I compromising on my pro-life values by receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine?

Catholic moral teaching calls us to care for the common good, avoiding association with grave evil. Our Catholic moral teachings also teach us to take action to protect each and every person we encounter, especially the most vulnerable. This teaching has not changed in the life of the Church, and will never change. Our opposition to abortion and the development of vaccines using cell lines descended from the act of abortion should be made clear to pharmaceutical companies.

When applying these moral values to the complex and nuanced situations we face in daily life, we are called to use the virtue of prudence. Prudence calls us to seek the most good in each and every situation, while avoiding evil. For many of us, our commitment to protecting life at all stages calls each of us to receive the COVID-19 vaccine when it is available, in order to defend those most at risk of serious coronavirus. Because the state of Maryland and the District of Columbia have limited vaccines available during this rollout process, we encourage each member of the Archdiocese of Washington to receive the COVID-19 vaccine that is most readily and easily available. By seeking vaccination, we can help to protect our vulnerable communities from this deadly pandemic.