

Update March 3, 2021: Since the Synod published the following January 2021 fact sheet addressing the currently available COVID-19 vaccines, more vaccines have been and will continue to be approved. Given the pace with which these vaccines are developed and produced, however, we do not consider it advisable to detail each and every vaccine made available. The science is too technical to insure we treat them all adequately. As we noted in the original document, however, we encourage our members to inform themselves using the best pro-life resources at their disposal. We in particular direct them to consult the principal source we used in drafting our statement: the pro-life scientists of the Charlotte Lozier Institute. You can find their discussion of the COVID-19 vaccines here: lozierinstitute.org/update-covid-19-vaccine-candidates-and-abortion-derived-cell-lines.

The LCMS and COVID-19 Vaccines: Facts and Considerations

COVID-19 Vaccines and Abortion

- Reliable information on the sourcing and testing of COVID-19 vaccines from the pro-life researchers of the Charlotte Lozier Institute may be found at lozierinstitute.org/update-covid-19-vaccine-candidates-and-abortion-derived-cell-lines/.
- According to the Lozier Institute, the current FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines (Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna) do not use aborted human fetal tissue in the design, development or production of the vaccines.^{1 2}
- The current FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines have been *tested* using human fetal cell lines (as are many other medicines, such as the MMR and polio vaccines, as well as treatments for HIV, Parkinson's and diabetes), but the vaccines themselves do not contain any aborted fetal cells.³
- Many remaining COVID-19 vaccines in development do use human fetal cell lines and are therefore considered “ethically controversial” (for instance, the UK-approved Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine as well as the one from Janssen/Johnson & Johnson).

COVID-19 Vaccines and the Synod

- The Synod in convention has repeatedly adopted resolutions supporting the sanctity of human life and opposing abortion (e.g., 2019 Resolution 3-02A, 2010 Resolution 6-02A, 2007 Resolution 6-02, 2004 Resolution 6-04).
- The Synod in convention has not officially adopted a resolution concerning the use of vaccines developed from or tested using fetal cell lines.
- The absence of an official Synod stance does not impact an individual's ability to seek a religious or personal belief exemption from vaccine requirements. In many states, religious exemptions from vaccine requirements can be obtained by individuals on the basis of conscientious objection.
- Complete consensus does not exist in the pro-life community at-large on the reception of vaccines developed from or tested using fetal cell lines (e.g., the debates within Roman Catholic circles).⁴

- The Commission on Theology and Church Relations has published no report or opinion on vaccines. It has discussed the possibility of addressing it pursuant to 2019 Resolution 11-01A (“To Give Guidance and Encourage Action on Beginning-of-Life Issues”), but work on that has not begun.

What We Can Say

- The Synod remains steadfastly committed to the sanctity of human life and supportive of those institutions and individuals advocating for the unborn.
- Genuine concerns for life exist on both sides of the COVID-19 vaccination question: concern for the use of aborted fetal cells in the design, development, production and testing of vaccines, as well as concern for the physical well-being of one’s neighbor endangered by the virus.
- There is no official Synod position on the use of COVID-19 vaccines (as such positions are ordinarily expressed through a resolution of the Synod in convention).
- Christians should respect the consciences of one another on a question where Scripture and the Synod have not spoken expressly.
- Members of the Synod and Synod congregations are encouraged to:
 - Educate themselves about the vaccines;
 - Consult with trusted health care providers, clergy and those who may be impacted by their decision; and
 - Act on the basis of informed conscience as to receiving the vaccine.

¹ For this and other information on the use of fetal cell lines in relation to COVID-19 vaccines, see lozierinstitute.org/an-ethics-assessment-of-covid-19-vaccine-programs/. The two cell lines pertinent to COVID-19 vaccines — HEK-293 and PER.C6 — were developed by a Dutch scientist from separate abortions that occurred in 1972 and 1985, respectively, though these abortions were not undertaken for the purpose of medical research. On this, see “Human Cell Strains in Vaccine Development,” *The History of Vaccines*, last modified Jan. 10, 2018, historyofvaccines.org/content/articles/human-cell-strains-vaccine-development. See also Meredith Wadman, “Abortion Opponents Protest COVID-19 Vaccines’ Use of Fetal Cells,” *Science*, June 5, 2020, sciencemag.org/news/2020/06/abortion-opponents-protest-covid-19-vaccines-use-fetal-cells.

² Some objections have been raised within Roman Catholic circles to the status of the Moderna vaccine. See Stacy Trasancos, “Measuring Moderna’s COVID-19 Vaccine: Now’s the Time to Press Hard for Ethical Options,” *National Catholic Register*, Nov. 20, 2020, ncregister.com/news/measuring-moderna-s-covid-19-vaccine-now-s-the-time-to-press-hard-for-ethical-options.

³ See Ivan Couronne, “How Fetal Cells from the 1970s Power Medical Innovation Today,” *Medical Xpress*, Oct. 20, 2020, medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-fetal-cells-1970s-power-medical.html. See also Carina Storrs, “How Exactly Fetal Tissue Is Used for Medicine,” *CNN*, Dec. 8, 2017, cnn.com/2015/07/17/health/fetal-tissue-explainer/index.html.

⁴ “Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses,” Immunization Action Coalition, June 9, 2005, immunize.org/talking-about-vaccines/vaticandocument.htm. “Conscience Exemption for Vaccines Based on Fetal Tissue from Abortions,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, last modified April 2015, usccb.org/resources/PL%20Secretariat%20Vaccines-Conscience-Exemption-updated-April-2015_0.pdf. See also the recent discussion in the *National Review*: Isaac Schorr, “The Facts about the COVID Vaccines and Fetal Cell Lines,” *National Review*, Dec. 20, 2020, nationalreview.com/2020/12/the-facts-about-the-pfizer-and-moderna-vaccines-and-fetal-cell-lines/.

