

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful**

As part of our core aims to promote and improve the health of the muslim and wider community in Australia, Muslim Health Professionals Australia (MHPA) would like to address the most common questions and concerns from religious scholars and the wider muslim community regarding the COVID-19 vaccinations which will likely become available in Australia in the coming months. This is in order to allow our scholars and the muslim community to make informed decisions regarding vaccination for themselves and their families.

These brief answers are based on the Q&A document developed by the British Board of Scholars and Imams (BBSI)<sup>1</sup>, which we strongly advise everyone to read alongside this statement. It is also informed by the current medical literature, the expert medical opinion of large muslim medical organisations<sup>2,3</sup>, and the knowledge and recommendations of pious muslim doctors who are experts in virology and involved in coronavirus vaccine research.

Many large fatwa councils around the world have already published Islamic legal rulings regarding the permissibility of the recently developed COVID-19 vaccines<sup>1,4-6</sup>. Muslims were among the first to discover and practice vaccination in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and since the advent of modern vaccination programs, muslim jurists worldwide have almost unanimously argued for the permissibility and importance of vaccination to safeguard life and health<sup>7</sup>.

### ***Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?***

Vaccines are among the most utilised medications in the world, ranking alongside tablets like Paracetamol. This is because so many people have taken them that any problems would have become apparent long ago. If 1000 people take a medication and there was a 0.1% chance of it causing death, for example, that one person might be missed. But if a billion people were to take that medication, a million deaths are much harder to miss! Because this clearly has not happened, it is evident that vaccines are, in general, safe for use - though of course, as with any other medication, individuals may rarely react to them and suffer side effects, sometimes serious ones. However most diseases we vaccinate against frequently cause death or serious disability, so the benefit of taking vaccinations far outweigh their risks.

The COVID19 vaccines, of course, have been produced in record time (months rather than years). Because of this, it is understandable that there is concern about their safety. However, there are a number of reasons for this which have nothing to do with 'cutting corners'. These include unprecedented funding due to the severity of the pandemic, technological advances (e.g. in genetic sequencing of the virus and repurposing of existing vaccines), and the cutting of bureaucracy and politics which has allowed international collaboration to start and run trials more efficiently.

Reliable information has shown over 90% effectiveness for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, and 60-90% for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine<sup>8-10</sup>. The Oxford vaccine utilises older vaccine technology which is known to be extremely safe. While the mRNA based Pfizer and Moderna vaccines utilise newer technology, they have now been given to over 1 million people in trials and early roll out without any unexpected or long lasting side effects. Significant allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) have occurred at a rate of 1 per 100,000 people, which is significantly less than the 1 in 300 anaphylaxis

risk we all have during our lifetime due to food, other medications and insect bites<sup>11</sup>. RNA vaccines have also been used in cancer studies for the last 7 years without serious concerns.

It should also not be forgotten that COVID is a deadly and highly contagious virus, which has already taken the lives of many in the community and caused significant economic harm to people's livelihoods. Dealing with this is imperative from a moral and material point of view.

### ***Do the vaccines contain any haram products or foetal cells?***

None of the currently available vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna, or the Oxford vaccine) contain gelatine or any animal products. This has been independently verified by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency in the UK<sup>12-13</sup>. The Oxford vaccine contains trace amounts of ethanol, a synthetic alcohol used as a stabiliser in many other medications.

The claim that vaccines contain foetal cells is simply incorrect. Most vaccines need to be carried into the body using a harmless virus. These carrier viruses for vaccines need to grow in cells – whether animal or human: this is part of the process of their production. However, a cell is hundreds of times the size of a virus, so it is impossible for a cell to be in a virus. In the final production of the vaccine, there are no cells of any kind remaining.

It is true that some vaccine components may have been grown in stem cells derived from other stem cells that were originally sourced from a foetus (WI-38) that was aborted for non medical reasons in the 1970s. Of the currently available COVID vaccines, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were not produced using foetal cell-lines, whilst the Oxford vaccine contains molecules grown in these descendent cells but which do not make it into the final product. Muslim jurists have already addressed the permissibility of using such vaccines based on Islamic jurisprudential maxims<sup>7</sup>.

### ***Can the vaccine change my DNA or allow tracking?***

The idea of introducing genetic material to the body might sound strange, but it is a fact of human life that we are exposed to RNA and DNA from foreign bodies all the time – viruses, other pathogens and even the food we eat. There are two types of vaccines: those which use deactivated or weakened viruses to provoke a protective immune response in the body (like the Oxford COVID vaccine), and newer ones which use synthetic strands of mRNA (like the Pfizer or Moderna COVID vaccines). RNA does not enter the nucleus of the cell where our DNA is stored, and there is no mechanism in the body to integrate RNA back into DNA. Therefore, neither vaccine type appears to affect the DNA inside our cells, nor have any vaccines (which have been around for decades) been shown to affect human DNA.

RNA is incredibly fragile. It only lasts for 4-5 days within cells, and is then destroyed by the cell's clearing mechanisms. There is no credible evidence to suggest that vaccines or other forms of medication can be used to track people. In terms of worrying about those who might wish us harm, the believer must always remember that all power lies in the hands of Allah, and that no harm can come to us save for what our Lord, in His Divine wisdom and mercy, has decreed for us.

### ***Do all medical professionals share the same opinion about the vaccine?***

Vaccines have prevented over ten million deaths since the 1960's alone<sup>14</sup>, and are among the safest of all medications ever produced. Most doctors are not specialists in vaccine development, and take their medical information from trusted experts and evidence in the medical literature to decide whether a new medication has benefits which outweigh its possible risks. In the context of COVID-19 vaccinations, medical experts in virology and vaccines, and who are involved in COVID-19 research, have clearly stated that the benefits of these vaccinations far outweigh their risks.

It is important to note that the small number of medical professionals who have expressed anti-vaccine sentiments are neither experts in vaccination nor involved in COVID-19 research, and often express belief in conspiracy theories or opinions which cannot be verified. In our age of social media, a huge amount of lies and misinformation are spread for reasons of profit or to deliberately harm social cohesion. Both muslim doctors, and muslims in general, are required by our religion to verify important information and assess the reliability of sources of knowledge. We must trust in the recommendations of experts who also have a reputation for telling the truth, and avoid the opinions of non-experts or those whose character cannot be verified.

For more information, see the BBSI document: Top Ten Questions Imams and Scholars Get Asked About Vaccines<sup>1</sup>, or visit the Melbourne Vaccine Education Centre at <https://mvec.mcri.edu.au/>

#### **References:**

1. Top Ten Questions Imams & Scholars Get Asked About Vaccines. British Board of Scholars & Imams (BBSI). Published 24th December 2020. <http://www.bbsi.org.uk/top-ten-questions-imams-scholars-get-asked-about-vaccines/>
2. Position Statement On The Pfizer/Biontech Covid-19 Vaccine. British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA). Published 6<sup>th</sup> December 2020. <https://britishima.org/pfizer-biontech-covid19-vaccine/>
3. National Muslim Task Force on COVID-19 and National Black Muslim COVID Coalition Statement Regarding COVID-19 Vaccines. American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP) and Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA). Published 21<sup>st</sup> December 2020. [https://imana.org/imana-backup/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/NMTFC\\_NBMCC-and-COVID-vaccines.pdf](https://imana.org/imana-backup/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/NMTFC_NBMCC-and-COVID-vaccines.pdf)
4. The Ruling on Getting the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Vaccine, Fatwa ID 87763, Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America (AMJA), 13<sup>th</sup> December 2020, <https://www.amjaonline.org/fatwa/en/87763/the-ruling-on-getting-the-covid-19-coronavirus-vaccine>
5. Religious position on COVID-19 Vaccine. Islamic Religious Council of Singapore. <https://www.muis.gov.sg/officeofthemufti/lrsyad/Part-11-Religious-position-on-COVID-19-vaccine-English>
6. Wifaqululama. Pfizer / BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine. Fatwa ID: 00029. 2020 Dec 6. Available from: <https://www.wifaqululama.co.uk/wifaq-pfizer>
7. Vaccines: Religio-cultural arguments from an Islamic perspective. Mufti Usman Maravia. Journal of the British Islamic Medical Association (JBIMA), Vol 6 Issue 2. Dec 2020. <https://jbima.com/article/vaccines-religio-cultural-arguments-from-an-islamic-perspective/>
8. Polack FP, Thomas SJ, Kitchin N, et al. Safety and efficacy of the BNT162b2 Covid-19 vaccine. N Engl J Med 2020; 383:2603-15.
9. Baden, Lindsey R., et al. Efficacy and Safety of the mRNA-1273 SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine. New England Journal of Medicine (2020).
10. Safety and efficacy of the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine (AZD1222) against SARS-CoV-2: an interim analysis of four randomised controlled trials in Brazil, South Africa, and the UK. Lancet 2020.
11. Panesar, S. S., et al. "The epidemiology of anaphylaxis in Europe: a systematic review." Allergy 68.11 (2013): 1353-1361.
12. Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. Regulatory approval of Pfizer / BioNTech vaccine for COVID-19; 2020 [cited 2020 Dec 5]. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-pfizer-biontech-vaccine-for-covid-19>
13. Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. Regulatory approval of AstraZeneca vaccine for COVID-19; 2020 [cited 2020 Dec 5]. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca/information-for-uk-recipients-on-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca>
14. Olshansky, S. J., and L. Hayflick. "The role of the WI-38 cell strain in saving lives and reducing morbidity." AIMS public health 4.2 (2017): 127.