



**South Dakota Catholic Conference**  
P.O. Box 1205., Sioux Falls SD 57101 | 605.351.5609  
[cmotz@sdcatholicconference.org](mailto:cmotz@sdcatholicconference.org)

## MEMORANDUM

To: Pastors and Catholic school leaders  
From: SD Catholic Conference  
Date: December 30, 2020  
Re: FAQ – COVID-19 Vaccines and Catholic ministries

### 1. Is there a COVID-19 vaccine currently available?

Two weeks ago, South Dakota began receiving shipments of vaccines produced by Pfizer Inc. and ModernaTX, Inc.. These vaccines received Emergency Use Authorizations (EUA) through a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) crisis procedure that facilitates the availability and use of vaccines during public health emergencies. Additional vaccine shipments are expected on a weekly basis. While it is unclear when doses will be available in sufficient quantities to meet all demand, public officials have established a plan for orderly distribution. According to this plan, health care workers and long-term care facility workers and residents will be among the first given the opportunity to be vaccinated.

### 2. When will Catholic parish staff and school teachers and staff be able to receive a COVID-19 vaccine?

Initially, there are not enough doses available for all adults. Government planning efforts are focused on who should receive a vaccine first. Health care workers and long-term care facility residents will be among the first. Teachers are included among early priority groups alongside those aged 65+ and those with two or more underlying medical conditions. Vaccine supplies will increase over time, and all adults should be able to get vaccinated later in 2021, perhaps as early as late spring or early summer.

### 3. Can I receive a COVID vaccination in good faith?

Yes, IF certain conditions are met. For any vaccine that has a remote connection to aborted-fetal cells, Catholics may in good conscience receive it IF no alternative is available and if proportionally serious reason exists.<sup>1</sup> The vaccines produced by Pfizer and Moderna were not developed using cell lines that originated in the body of an aborted baby at any level of design, development, or production, though their efficacy may have been evaluated with a test with such a connection.<sup>2</sup> However, other vaccines in development have used abortion-derived cell lines in development, such as those made by AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson (Janssen).<sup>3</sup> These latter should be avoided if a vaccine with a more remote connection is available. Moreover, because of the grave evil abortion poses, it is appropriate to make one's respect for life and objection to such vaccines known. This could be done in a variety of ways.

---

<sup>1</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "[Conscience Exemption for Vaccines based on Fetal Tissue from Abortions](#)," last updated April 2015.

<sup>2</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "[Vaccines for Covid-19](#)" Memorandum, Nov. 20, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Charlotte Lozier Institute, "[Analysis of Covid-19 Vaccine Candidates](#)," last updated Dec. 14, 2020.

#### **4. Do Catholics have a duty to receive a COVID-19 vaccination?**

The Vatican wrote recently, “practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation.”<sup>4</sup> Vaccination is a decision that each person must make for oneself and for those under one’s care (for example, one’s children or an incapacitated adult). There are many potentially relevant facts about this decision. For example, information about vaccine origin, safety, and reliability; one’s own risk for infection and the potential consequences for one’s self and others if infected; the overall severity of the illness and the public health crisis in one’s location; the possibility and risk of adverse side effects of immunization; availability; cost; and related factors.

At the same time, although these are serious considerations, the refusal to immunize could itself involve a degree of moral irresponsibility, depending on the harms that are risked or disregarded. We must be cautious not to employ the same shallow logic that we rightly criticize in pro-abortion argumentation; namely, that it is “my body, my choice,” that my decision is a totally individual one made in isolation from the possible impact on others. While Catholic teaching upholds the values of autonomy and self-determination, it also understands that autonomy is not an absolute right but is conditioned by the common good.

In the present circumstances, as we near the one-year anniversary of COVID-19 in our country, and with the considerable social, economic, emotional, and even spiritual harms we have seen endured across the human family, and recognizing that many persons remain vulnerable, accepting a safe and effective vaccine is justified as a moral good, an act of solidarity and charity, and is arguably a work of mercy.

Even so, the vaccines are yet new and were created in a timeframe without precedent in modern medicine. To our knowledge, those vaccines currently authorized under an EUA have not been yet been tested on or approved for children, and impact on fertility, pregnancy, and other long-term effects are unknown. For the overwhelming majority of people, COVID-19 has not proven lethal or even particularly dangerous, and pursuant to official vaccine distribution plans, the most vulnerable will be afforded the opportunity to immunize prior to the general public, which further mitigates the possible risk posed to those in increased-risk categories. Moreover, it also seems that a sizable proportion of the population will voluntarily choose to vaccinate. Taken together with natural immunity from infection (should this general immunological principle hold), herd immunity appears likely to emerge. Therefore, there is no general duty on the part of all persons, irrespective of age, health, occupation, and other circumstances, to receive a COVID-19 vaccination. Vaccination for COVID-19 is not a universal moral obligation. Rather, it should be discerned in light of the considerations outlined above.

#### **5. Are Catholic parish or school employees in South Dakota required to receive a COVID-19 vaccine?**

No, Catholic parish or school employees are not required to receive a COVID-19 vaccine as a condition of their employment.

#### **6. Can a Catholic parish or school in South Dakota require its employees/volunteers to receive a COVID-19 vaccine as a condition of their employment/volunteer service?**

Legally, an employer may mandate vaccinations in many circumstances as a condition of continued employment. Whether it *should* do so, however, is a separate question. Though some populations should be encouraged to receive a vaccination consistent with their risk and the risk of those they serve in close proximity, in light of the considerations mentioned above regarding the lack of a generalized duty of all individuals to receive a vaccine, we discourage such employment requirements at this time, especially since initially the vaccines are only made available pursuant to an EUA.

---

<sup>4</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [\*Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines\*](#), Dec. 21, 2020.

**7. Can Catholic parishes or schools in South Dakota require its faith-formation children or students to receive a COVID-19 vaccine in order to attend in-person learning or participate in school sponsored activities?**

No, COVID-19 vaccines are not currently approved for children.. COVID-19 vaccines may not be available for young children until more studies are completed. South Dakota does not at this time intend to require COVID-19 immunization for school children.

**8. Where can I get more information related to the COVID-19 vaccines?**

Both the CDC and SD Department of Health have up-to-date information about the health, safety, planned distribution, and availability of COVID-19 vaccines on their websites:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>
- [https://doh.sd.gov/documents/COVID19/Vaccine/covid\\_vaccine\\_FAQ.pdf](https://doh.sd.gov/documents/COVID19/Vaccine/covid_vaccine_FAQ.pdf);  
[https://doh.sd.gov/documents/COVID19/SD\\_COVID-19VaccinationPlan.pdf](https://doh.sd.gov/documents/COVID19/SD_COVID-19VaccinationPlan.pdf)

The South Dakota Catholic Conference has up-to-date information and considerations regarding the moral questions related to vaccines, including links to Church teaching resources examining the question of remote cooperation with immoral acts:

- <http://www.sdatholicconference.org/covid-19-vaccinations-sd/>