

Johnson & Johnson vaccine research method creates conflict for Catholics

Anti-abortion worshippers concerned over J&J vaccine's connection to abortion

A much-needed [third COVID-19](#) vaccine is being distributed throughout the U.S. this week, but the Catholic Church finds itself in a moral dilemma over the vaccine's research methods.

[Johnson & Johnson's coronavirus vaccine was recently authorized](#) by the U.S. for widespread use across the nation, giving the country a third vaccine to help prevent virus infections and spread. The pandemic has ended so many lives and vaccines are in high demand, but the J&J vaccine is [born out of research that the church has long spoken out against](#).

"It's so vital, first of all, to receive the vaccine, certainly as an act of charity for our brothers and sisters and an act of charity to bring to an end this health condition, this pandemic," said Monsignor Gary Smetanka.

While the Archdiocese of Detroit recognizes the need for more vaccines, the J&J vaccine emerged from research dating back to the 1970s that proves controversial for Catholics.

"There have been use of some cell lines from aborted babies and so there is a little more connection with that with the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, and less with that with Prizer and Moderna," Smetanka said.

As the state receives 80,000 doses of the J&J COVID vaccine, Michigan's seven Catholic bishops, including Detroit Archbishop Alan Vigneron, [published a letter this week](#) expressing their concerns with the company's vaccine, citing their disapproval of abortion and its connection to vaccine research.

You can read the statement in full below.

However, since coronavirus vaccine doses remain in high demand and very limited supply, officials are encouraging people to get vaccinated when they can, despite their concerns about the research.

"If no other vaccines are available, certainly take the J&J vaccine," Smetanka said. "Sometimes we have a choice, a lot of times we don't have a choice."

Local 4 reached out to Johnson & Johnson on Friday for a response to the letters of concern cropping up among diocese across the country. The company has not responded, and we have not found any related statements made by the company in other publications.

Below is a [statement issued by members of the Michigan Catholic Conference](#) on March 3.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Peace be with you!

As vaccines for COVID-19 continue to become available, we wish to address the moral questions that have arisen, insofar as some vaccines are developed using cells lines that have originated from the tissue taken from babies who were aborted decades ago.¹ Abortion is a grave evil, and we must avoid complicity in abortion. Let us also pray for God's peace, healing, and mercy for all those who have had abortions.

It is morally permissible to receive the vaccines developed by Pfizer and Moderna. Neither of these vaccines have used cell lines originating in tissue taken from aborted babies in their design, development, and production. However, both the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccine did use such a cell line in the confirmatory testing. This connection to the abortion is very remote, however, and it is important to keep in mind that there are varying levels of responsibility. Greater moral responsibility lies with the researchers than with those who receive the vaccine. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has indicated that it is morally permissible to be vaccinated if there are no alternatives and there are serious health risks.² Such serious health risks are present due to the current pandemic. The vaccines developed by Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca are more morally problematic, however. They utilized in the design, production, development, and confirmatory testing a cell line that originated from tissue taken from an aborted baby. These vaccines may be received only if there are no other alternatives. If one does not have a choice of vaccine and a delay in immunization may bring about serious consequences for one's health and the health of others, it would be permissible to accept the Johnson & Johnson or AstraZeneca vaccine. Both are somewhat similar in production to the Rubella vaccine, which the Pontifical Academy of Life indicated could be received for grave reasons and if there are no other alternatives.

If one were to choose not to be vaccinated, one would have a moral responsibility to embrace the necessary precautions to avoid spreading the disease to others.

At this same time, we join our voices to call for the development of vaccines that have no connection to abortion. Our consciences must not be dulled, nor may we imply in any way that abortion is acceptable.

Let us implore the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that God may bring an end to the pandemic and that all esteem and respect the dignity of human life.

Statement from the Michigan Catholic Conference

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