

Update September 24, 2021: The fact sheet below, originally published in January 2021, was intended (1) as a general guide to the available information on the COVID-19 vaccines and their relation to abortion through the use of fetal cell lines; (2) Synod's current position on the use of such vaccines; and (3) pastoral counsel for those deciding whether to be vaccinated or not. Technical terminology was intentionally minimized in keeping with the intended general audience. The fact sheet should not be mistaken for directive scientific, medical, legal, or political guidance on this deeply sensitive and highly complex issue. As noted in the original document, we continue to encourage our members to inform themselves using the best pro-life resources at their disposal and we direct them to 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 Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines do not use aborted human fetal tissue in the design, development or production of the vaccines.^{1 2}
- The Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have been *tested* using human fetal cell lines (as are many other medicines, such as the MMR and chickenpox vaccines, as well as treatments for HIV, Parkinson's and diabetes), but the vaccines themselves do not contain any aborted fetal cells.^{3 4}
- Many remaining COVID-19 vaccines in use or development, including Janssen/Johnson & Johnson and the UK-approved Oxford AstraZeneca, do use human fetal cell lines and are therefore considered “ethically controversial.”

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).⁵
- The LCMS 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 Stephanie Hauer, “Fetal Cells in the Cosmetics, Food and Medical Industries,” (Nov 14, 2020), rehumanizeintl.org/post/fetal-cells-in-the-cosmetics-food-and-medical-industries.

⁵ “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/.