



CCCBC Note on Ethical Concerns Related to Currently Approved COVID-19 Vaccines

**Clarification
11 March 2021**

On 9 March 2021, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCBC) published a short “Note on Ethical Concerns Related to Currently Approved COVID-19 Vaccines.” This Note was published in response to questions from Catholics who were concerned about the moral permissibility of receiving currently-approved COVID-19 vaccines. The Note did not refer to, nor intend to question the medical efficacy of any vaccine. In response to questions received since the publication of the Note, the CCCBC wishes to clarify any misunderstandings that may have arisen.

1. Catholics are invited to be vaccinated, both in keeping with the dictates of their conscience and in contributing to the common good by promoting the health and safety of others.
2. The CCCBC Note of 9 March 2021 simply restates the position outlined by the Holy See in its [Note of December 21, 2020](#) regarding the use of vaccines.
3. All COVID-19 vaccines that are medically approved by the relevant health authorities may be licitly received by Catholics.
4. Since there is currently no choice of vaccine being offered, Catholics in good conscience, may receive the vaccine that is available and offered to them.

On this National Day of Observance for COVID-19, we remember in thought and prayer those whom we have lost and those who have experienced most acutely the impact of the pandemic. We likewise offer our profound appreciation and heartfelt gratitude for the many people working and volunteering in occupations and services that provide care for others, which often comes with great personal sacrifice.

Any further inquiries should be directed to the CCCBC Communications Service at: communications@cccb.ca



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The decision to receive any COVID-19 vaccine is one of individual conscience in consultation with one's physician or healthcare provider. Choosing to be vaccinated, particularly amid the current pandemic, can be an act of charity which recognizes the need to care for others.

The CCCBC echoes the call of the Holy See,¹ by reiterating its appeal to governments to “ensure that COVID-19 vaccines that become available do not create an ethical dilemma for Canadians,”² thus encouraging greater vaccine uptake among the general population and strengthening the common good of our Canadian society.

The recent approvals by Health Canada of the AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines against COVID-19³ have given rise to questions among Catholics about the moral permissibility of receiving vaccines whose development, production, and/or testing has involved the use of abortion-derived cell lines. These questions are important for they concern the sacredness of human life and its inherent dignity.

The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines already approved in Canada do not use abortion-derived cell lines in their development and production of the vaccine, however in some of their final testing processes, they have used unethically-derived cell lines. These two vaccines currently available in Canada can be morally acceptable for Catholics to receive since the connection to abortion is extremely remote.

In contrast to these vaccines, the AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines utilized abortion-derived cell lines in their development, production, and confirmatory testing.⁴ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith makes the distinction between the

¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [*Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines*](#) (21 December 2020), n. 4 “Both pharmaceutical companies and governmental health agencies are therefore encouraged to produce, approve, distribute and offer ethically acceptable vaccines that do not create problems of conscience for either health care providers or the people to be vaccinated.”

² [Letter signed by the CCCBC President to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regarding ethical COVID-19 vaccines \(21 May 2020\).](#)

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2021/02/health-canada-authorizes-astrazeneca-and-verity-pharmaceuticals-inc-serum-institute-of-india-covid-19-vaccines.html> / <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2021/03/health-canada-authorizes-janssen-covid-19-vaccine.html>

⁴ <https://lozierinstitute.org/update-covid-19-vaccine-candidates-and-abortion-derived-cell-lines/>

The same would be true of any other adenovirus vector vaccines which may be approved by Health Canada in the future.

differing moral obligations for those who develop such vaccines and those who receive them. They have reassured Catholics that “when ethically irreproachable Covid-19 vaccines are not available . . . *it is morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process.*”⁵

Therefore, when provided with a choice between receiving different vaccines, the vaccine with the least connection to abortion-derived cell lines should always be preferred and chosen when possible. This means that given the currently approved vaccine options in Canada, *if/when presented with the choice*, one should choose to receive either the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine over the AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson vaccine. When no choice of vaccine is available, the AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson vaccine (or any other COVID-19 vaccine that may be approved) “can be used in good conscience with the certain knowledge that the use of such vaccines does not constitute formal cooperation with abortion.”⁶

Consequently, if it is possible in a given area or local region to choose a vaccine, Pfizer and Moderna would be recommended at this stage. However, when a choice is not provided or it is quite difficult to have recourse to these said vaccines, given the health urgency at hand and other considerations, nothing morally prevents anyone from receiving in good conscience the AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson vaccines or others that may eventually be approved which will have been developed, tested and produced in a similar fashion.

9 March 2021

⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [*Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines*](#) (21 December 2020), n. 2.

⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [*Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines*](#) (21 December 2020), n. 3.