



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER

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NCBC Statement on COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates (Amended)

The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC) does not endorse mandated COVID-19 immunization with any of the three vaccines that have received approval or emergency use authorization as of August 23, 2021, from the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA).

The most authoritative guidance from the Catholic Church issued on this topic comes from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and emphasizes that individuals must discern whether to be vaccinated or not in conscience and without coercion:

“Practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary. In any case, from the ethical point of view, *the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one's own health, but also on the duty to pursue the common good*. In the absence of other means to stop or even prevent the epidemic, the common good may recommend vaccination, especially to protect the weakest and most exposed. Those who, however, for reasons of conscience, refuse vaccines produced with cell lines from aborted fetuses, must do their utmost to avoid, by other prophylactic means and appropriate behavior, becoming vehicles for the transmission of the infectious agent.”¹

Several key points should be kept in mind by any institution that might consider incentivizing or requiring the use of COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the USA.

1. The Church has consistently pointed out the ethical problems with vaccines produced and/or tested using abortion-derived cell lines. The Church has judged it permissible for people to either accept (under protest) or reject the use of such vaccines.² In other words, there is no universal moral obligation to accept or refuse them, and it should be a voluntary decision of the individual. Catholic institutions, in particular, should respect the decisions of people to decline use of vaccines dependent on abortion-derived cell lines. This is especially relevant when there are other means of mitigating risk.
2. The best ethical decision-making occurs when individuals have sufficient information for discernment and are able to reflect without undue external pressures placed on them. Mandates, by their very nature, exert pressure that can be severe if employment or the ability to further one's education are threatened. Indeed, it would be a radical departure from past practice to impose a mandate involving an unapproved vaccine available only under an Emergency Use Authorization.
3. The novelty of the SARS-CoV-2 and of the technologies for eliciting an immune response to prevent or mitigate COVID-19 leave several medical questions unanswered. Only time and

¹ https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html

² <https://www.ncbcenter.org/ncbc-news/vaccinestatementupdated>

careful study of the virus and benefits and adverse effects of the vaccines will provide the answers many persons need to give free and informed consent.

4. If any institution mandates COVID-19 vaccination, the NCBC strongly urges robust, transparent, and readily accessible exemptions for medical, religious, and conscience reasons. Safeguarding the appropriate judgments of conscience³ of all individuals affiliated with the institution helps establish trust and avoid undue pressure during the important and personal process of deciding about appropriate medical care and serving the common good.
5. Recognizing the importance of public health, institutions that grant an exemption may require that recipients restrict their interpersonal interactions, but these restrictions should be the least burdensome possible.

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church sections 1776-1802, and especially 1790.