



The **Catholic Bishops**  
of **Alberta** and the  
**Northwest Territories**

Les **évêques catholiques**  
de l'**Alberta** et des  
**Territoires du Nord-Ouest**

8421 - 101 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T6A 0L1 | T 780.469.1010 F 780.465.3003

December 2, 2020

Dear Faithful in Christ,

Is it okay for a Catholic to be vaccinated against COVID-19? The short answer is: Yes, it is.

Reading this, many people might be surprised that the question is even being posed. What could be wrong about receiving a vaccine, when we know that vaccinations save lives? The Catholic Church does certainly support and encourage ethical scientific research into the development of vaccines that will mitigate or even end the harm caused by this terrible disease. The virus is linked with the death to date of more than one million people, and has caused great harm to millions more.

The moral issue arises from the fact that vaccine development and testing often make use of cell lines derived from either the tissue of aborted fetuses or destroyed human embryos. Therefore, reception of a vaccine developed and produced from this unethical research presents us with a dilemma that seriously engages our conscience. On the one hand, we know that widespread vaccination is a public health imperative to keep ourselves, our families and other citizens safe; on the other, we worry that receiving the vaccine would render us complicit in the moral evil of abortion, and thus unfaithful to the teaching of the Church on the sanctity of life.

Making use of abortion to create cell lines for research and development is an affront to human dignity and cannot be morally justified. Sadly, such cell lines are so widely used in the biopharmaceutical industry that a vaccine that has not been ethically compromised in its production and/or testing by their use may very well not be available for employment against COVID-19. Doctors and families should normally seek out ethically acceptable vaccines. When this is not possible, then there arises the specific question we address in this letter: in the midst of a pandemic that poses a serious threat to public health, is it morally permissible to receive a vaccine that has been produced unethically when an ethical alternative is not readily accessible?

In such a situation, we are guided by the Church's teaching, which directs us to differentiate among various degrees of cooperation in the evil of the act of abortion. Differentiation in degrees of the moral gravity of cooperation first pertains to the original abortion(s), then the derivation of cell lines, the process of vaccine development using these cell lines, the subsequent production and eventual sale, and finally the use of such a vaccine. With respect to someone simply receiving the vaccine, the degree of connection with the original evil act is so remote that, when there also exists a proportionately grave reason for vaccination, such as the current,

urgent need to halt the COVID-19 pandemic, then the Church assures us that it is morally permissible for Catholics to receive it for the good of personal and public health.<sup>1</sup>

However, this judgement must not be allowed to obscure the seriousness of the evil act that is the source of cell lines used in some vaccines, nor the corresponding ethical issues arising for those who work in research and development on them, or profit from their sale. It remains imperative that Catholics make clear their moral objection to vaccine development derived from abortion, and to advocate with their governments for ethically produced vaccines.

We address a special appeal to our Catholic brothers and sisters in the biopharmaceutical industry. Allow respect for the sanctity of human life from conception onward to find expression in work that leads to the replacement of morally illicit cell lines with ethically sourced ones. Please be assured of our prayerful support of this good and necessary endeavour.

Let us all together entrust ourselves and our world to the intercession of the Blessed Mother. May the powerful intercession of the Mother of God bring full healing to the sick, deep consolation to those who mourn, holy inspiration to researchers, and a swift end to the pandemic.

Mary, Health of the Sick, pray for us.

Yours in Christ,

Catholic Bishops of Alberta and NWT



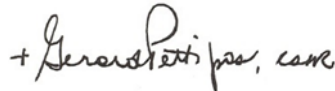
Most Reverend Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop of Edmonton



Most Reverend William McGrattan  
Bishop of Calgary



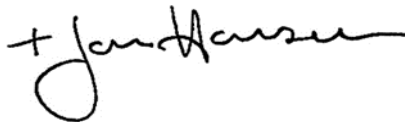
Most Reverend Paul Terrio  
Bishop of St. Paul



Most Reverend Gerard Pettipas, CSsR  
Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan



Most Reverend David Motiuk  
Bishop of the Ukrainian Eparchy of  
Edmonton



Most Reverend Jon Hansen, CSsR  
Bishop of Mackenzie-Fort Smith

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pontifical Academy for Life, *Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses* (9 June 2005); Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction Dignitas Personae: On Certain Bioethical Questions* (8 September 2008), 34-35.

**For further information and study, see the following resources:**

- Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute, [Letter to the Prime Minister](#), 21 May 2020.
- Catholic Health Alliance of Canada, [Ethical Issues Concerning Vaccines Derived from the Tissues of Aborted Fetuses](#), July 2020.
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Instruction Dignitas Personae: On Certain Bioethical Questions](#), 8 September 2008.
- Pontifical Academy for Life, [Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses](#), 9 June 2005.