



# COVID-19 Vaccines & Fetal Cell Line History

We understand that some religious groups have questions about the use of fetal cells in COVID-19 vaccine development. To that end, this document summarizes the historical background of vaccine development as well as various religious leaders' perspectives on that use.

Some of the COVID-19 vaccines being studied in clinical trials use cells originally isolated from fetal tissue (often referred to as fetal cells) in vaccine development or manufacturing. This research does not require fetal cells from new abortions; **they use existing historic cell lines that are many decades old.**

Historical fetal cell lines were derived in the 1960s and 1970s from two elective abortions unrelated to vaccine development. Fetal cell lines have been used to create vaccines for diseases such as hepatitis A, rubella, and rabies. The fetal cell lines being used to produce some of the potential COVID-19 vaccines are from two sources:

- HEK-293: A kidney cell line that was isolated from a terminated fetus in 1972
- PER.C6: A retinal cell line that was isolated from a terminated fetus in 1985

## ARE THE PFIZER AND MODERNA COVID-19 VACCINES DEVELOPED USING FETAL CELL LINES?

The mRNA COVID-19 vaccines produced by **Pfizer and Moderna do not require the use of any fetal cell cultures** to manufacture the vaccine.

Early in the development of mRNA vaccine technology, fetal cells were used to demonstrate how a cell could take up mRNA and produce the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein.

The **Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were found to be ethically uncontroversial by the pro-life policy organization the [Charlotte Lozier Institute](#).**

Further, Brian Kane, senior director of ethics for the **Catholic Health Association of the United States**, in an interview for the [America: The Jesuit Review](#) stated: "In terms of the moral principles of being concerned about the use of any pharmaceuticals that were developed from aborted fetuses, that is certainly an issue that we all want to be cognizant of and try to avoid their use. With that in mind, the **Pfizer and Moderna COVID vaccines that are coming out are not even tainted with that moral problem.**"

**"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."**

— U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

## IS THE JANSSEN (JOHNSON & JOHNSON) COVID-19 VACCINE DEVELOPED USING FETAL CELL LINES?

The vaccine produced by **Janssen does require the use of fetal cell cultures, specifically PER.C6, in order to produce and manufacture the vaccine.** The [Catholic Church](#) and the [Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission](#) have both stated that **receiving a COVID-19 vaccine that requires fetal cell lines for production or manufacture is morally acceptable.**

## Continue Vaccines & Fetal Cell Line History

The [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) has stated, “**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. However, if one can choose among equally safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, the vaccine with the least connection to abortion-derived cell lines should be chosen. Therefore, if one has the ability to choose a vaccine, Pfizer or Moderna’s vaccines should be chosen over Johnson & Johnson’s.”

It should be noted that due to the fact that demand currently outpaces supply of COVID-19 vaccines, as well as the overwhelming benefit of immediate vaccination weighed against the dangers of waiting, healthcare experts encourage all those eligible to accept the vaccine being offered to them.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have also stated that “**receiving a COVID-19 vaccine ... should be considered an act of love of our neighbor and part of our moral responsibility for the common good.**”

### WHY ARE FETAL CELLS USED TO MAKE VACCINES?

To develop and manufacture some vaccines, scientists working with pharmaceutical companies prefer human cell lines over other cells because:

1. Viruses need cells to grow, and the viruses tend to grow better in cells from humans than animals (because they infect humans);
2. Fetal cells can be used longer than other cell types; and
3. Fetal cells can be maintained at low temperatures, allowing scientists to continue using cell lines from decades ago.

A comprehensive list of COVID-19 vaccines in development and any connection to fetal cell lines is available [here](#).

### WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

Religious groups and bioethics institutes that oppose the use of aborted fetal cells in the development or manufacturing of vaccines have noted that when options are not available, **it is morally acceptable to receive COVID-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses.** For more information from these groups, access the following links:

- [National Catholic Bioethics Center](#)
- [Pontifical Academy of Life Statement](#)
- [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)
- [The Vatican – Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#)
- [The North Dakota Catholic Conference](#)
- [Charlotte Lozier Institute](#)

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