

Vaccines are one way to gain immunity from a virus. They have various origins, traditionally relying on a weakened or harmless form of the targeted pathogen. More recently, molecular technology, thanks to advances in genetics, can provide the effect of vaccination without using the pathogen itself.

Some vaccines are developed (and tested) using animal cells. Some use human cells taken from ethically-acquired umbilical cord or placental tissue. Others, as noted, do not involve the use of cells at all, but rather the synthesis of proteins that have the desired effect. These three origins of vaccines do not carry ethical objections.





## Ethical considerations in vaccine creation

A fourth source for vaccines, however, involves cell lines that originated with tissue from two aborted fetuses some 60 years ago. Guidance from the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life in 2005 (updated in 2019) and the 2008 instruction "Dignitatis Personae" from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith address this concern in detail.

In summary, these documents permit the use of such vaccines under a specific set of considerations: the disease and its potential impact on individual and communal health is proportionately grave; there is no alternative vaccine; one does not condone or accept the vaccine specifically because of its tainted origin; and the vaccine in question is sufficiently "causally remote" from the immoral origin.

"Causally remote" here means that the two abortions in question (giving rise to two cell lines) took place in the early 1960s. After the many thousands of generations of cells originating

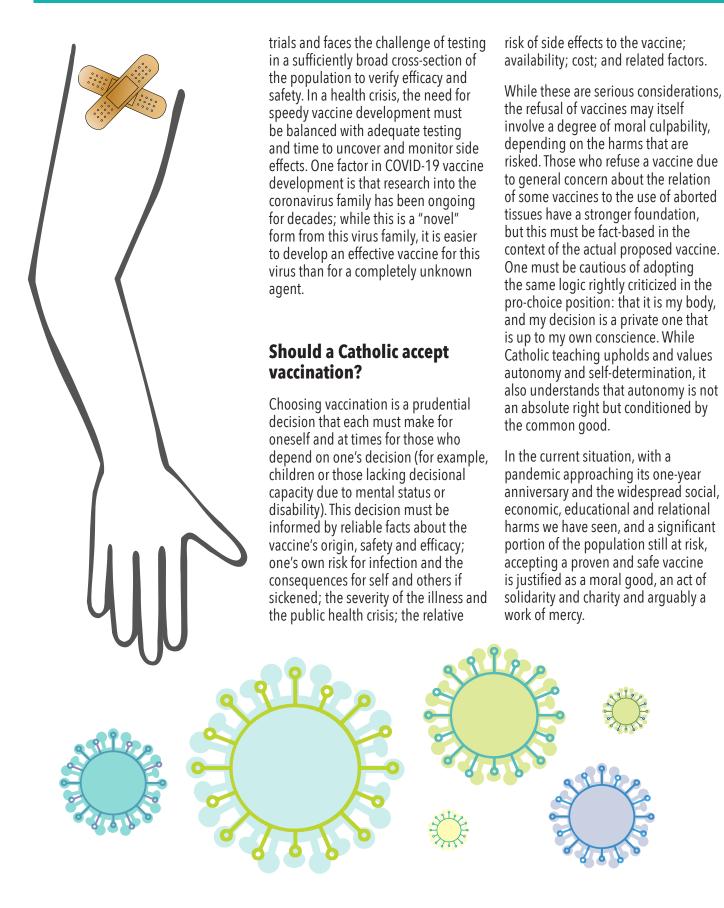
from that tissue, there are no actual descendant cells that were part of the fetal bodies. Further, the abortion did not take place specifically to develop the vaccine, and abortions are not done today to provide a continual source for these cells; the same cell line is self-perpetuating.

The two vaccines using mRNA technology that have currently shown the most promise for COVID-19 (from Pfizer and Moderna) do not have ethical concerns in their origins. However, both used a morally compromised cell line for one of the confirmatory lab tests of their products, as do other current vaccines available under the emergency-use protocols.

The same ethical considerations apply to both production and testing of vaccines, especially the remote causal distance from the tainted origin of cells and their use today. The Pontifical Academy for Life urges the faithful to pressure companies producing vaccines to create alternatives free of all of these concerns.

In addition, vaccine testing requires appropriate informed consent for human





Father Knoblach serves as consultant for healthcare ethics for the Diocese of St. Cloud. He is pastor of Sacred Heart in Sauk Rapids and Annunciation in Mayhew Lake.