

EQUITY

FORWARD

As COVID-19 Vaccines Have Been Rolled Out, Anti-Abortion, Anti-Fetal Tissue Research Groups Have Stoked Fears By Elevating Ideology Over Science

November 2020: Pharmaceutical Companies Moderna and Pfizer Announced Success In Their Respective Clinical Trials Of COVID-19 Vaccinations

Pfizer Announced Favorable Results Of Their Clinical Trial Of A COVID-19 Vaccination On November 9, 2020

On November 9, 2020 Pfizer Announced That Their COVID-19 Vaccine Was 95% Effective In Clinical Trials. “The drug maker Pfizer said on Wednesday that its coronavirus vaccine was 95 percent effective and had no serious side effects — the first set of complete results from a late-stage vaccine trial as Covid-19 cases [skyrocket around the globe](#). The data showed that the vaccine prevented mild and severe forms of Covid-19, the company said. And it was 94 percent effective in older adults, who are more vulnerable to developing severe Covid-19 and who do not respond strongly to some types of vaccines. Pfizer, which developed the vaccine with its partner BioNTech, said the companies planned to apply to the Food and Drug Administration for emergency authorization “within days,” raising hopes that a working vaccine could soon become a reality. The trial results — less than a year after researchers began working on the vaccine — shattered all speed records for vaccine development, a process that usually takes years.” [\[New York Times, 11/18/20\]](#)

Shortly After Pfizer’s Announcement, Moderna Shared News That They Too Ran A Successful Clinical Trial For A COVID-19 Vaccine

On November 16, 2020 Moderna Announced That Their COVID-19 Vaccine Was 94.5% Effective In Clinical Trials. “A second COVID-19 vaccine now also appears highly effective in preventing illness following exposure to the virus that causes the disease. The biotech company Moderna Inc. said Monday that its experimental vaccine was 94.5% effective in preventing disease, according to an analysis of its clinical trial. The news comes a week after Pfizer and BioNTech said their [vaccine was more than 90% effective](#). The results for both vaccines come from interim analyses of large clinical studies. In the Moderna study there were 30,000 volunteers. Half got two doses of the vaccine 28 days apart; half got two shots of a placebo on the same schedule. There were 95 instances of COVID-19 illness among the study participants; only five of those cases were in the vaccinated group. Ninety were in the group receiving the placebo. Of these, there were 11 cases of severe disease. The results indicate the vaccine was inducing the kind of immune response that protects people if they were exposed to the coronavirus. “This positive interim analysis from our Phase 3 study has given us the first clinical

validation that our vaccine can prevent COVID-19 disease, including severe disease," Stéphane Bancel, chief executive officer of Moderna, said in a statement." [\[NPR, 11/16/20\]](#)

Vaccines From Moderna And Pfizer Utilize Messenger RNA Technology Rather Than HEK-293 Cells, Which Are Derived From Aborted Fetal Tissue

The Vaccines Will Likely Be The First Approved Uses Of Messenger RNA Technology For Human Use. "If cleared, these two will be the first vaccines using [messenger RNA technology](#) ever approved for human use by the Food and Drug Administration. It is different from more traditional vaccines, which often use a weakened or dead version of a virus, or a laboratory-generated protein. Both vaccines use a snippet of the virus's genetic code to instruct cells to build the [spike protein on the surface of the coronavirus](#), teaching the immune system to recognize the real thing." [\[The Washington Post, 11/17/20\]](#)

Some COVID-19 Vaccines Have Used HEK-293 Cells, Derived From Aborted Fetal Tissue, To Produce Spike Proteins, But Moderna's Vaccine Relies On RNA To Trigger Spike Protein Production. "Moderna's vaccine is based on the virus' RNA, and uses a spike protein, or peplomer, from SARS-CoV-2 rather than cell lines derived from aborted fetuses. The RNA is injected into the recipient, which induces their cells to produce the spike protein. This triggers the production of antibodies and T cells by the recipient. Scientists not from Moderna had initially made DNA vectors with the gene sequence of the spike protein and injected them in HEK-293 cells to produce the spike protein. The HEK 293 cell line is derived from a baby who was aborted in the Netherlands in the 1970s. The production of the DNA vectors was studied and evaluated by experts at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the University of Texas, who determined that the spike protein was a good candidate for testing. Moderna was not involved in the DNA construction, nor was it involved in the evaluation of the construction. Dr. John Brehany, director of institutional relations at the NCBC, told CNA in July that while Moderna thus has some association with the use of cell lines from elective abortions, it is not responsible for that use, and its vaccine was not produced using HEK 293 cells." [\[Catholic Telegraph, 11/18/20\]](#)

Pfizer's Vaccine Also Relies On RNA To Trigger Spike Protein Production. "Numerous companies are developing coronavirus vaccines. The vaccines being developed by AstraZeneca and Janssen are produced using abortion-derived cell lines. Merck, Novavax, and Sanofi are producing vaccines from animal cells, while Inovio Pharmaceuticals is developing a DNA vaccine without the use of cells in its production. The Charlotte Lozier Institute holds these to be ethical permissible. Like Moderna's vaccine, Pfizer's is produced using the coronavirus' RNA. It recently announced a 90% effectiveness rate from its trial." [\[Catholic Telegraph, 11/18/20\]](#)

The Moderna And Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccines Have Received Mixed-Reviews From Anti-Abortion Groups

The Anti-Abortion Movement Has Not Reached Consensus On The Use Of Fetal Tissue And Cells Derived From Abortions Being Used In COVID-19 Vaccine Development. "The questions of distinction between vaccine and development and testing have dogged Christian ethicists for years, with some arguing that any use of aborted matter in producing drugs is immoral. Most, however, opt for a compromise. "We can concede the ethical validity of vaccine use, while not making total peace with the means of its development," [wrote](#) Andrew Walker, a

professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with regard to the Moderna news.” [\[Washington Examiner, 11/17/20\]](#)

Anti-Abortion Groups, Opposed To The Use Of HEK-293 Cell Lines Derived From Aborted Fetal Tissue, Have Heavily Monitored The Development Of COVID-19 Vaccines. “Pro-life advocates warily watching the race to develop a vaccine against the coronavirus have reason to be hopeful that an immunization will soon be approved that is not only effective, but that is made without the use of cells from aborted fetuses. The drugmaker Moderna’s announcement last week that their coronavirus vaccine is 94% effective is the latest promising news in the march to end of the global pandemic. That news along with today’s reports from the pharmaceutical company Pfizer that its new vaccine is 95% effective, offer hope that a vaccine will be available for limited distribution as soon as December. Assuming both vaccines are approved by the FDA, pro-life advocates won’t be faced with having to choose the one that was ethically-made. **Unlike some other vaccines in development, both vaccines were made without the use of fetal cells, or for that matter, any cells at all.** According to the pro-life [Charlotte Lozier Institute](#), in a comparison of vaccines in development, deemed both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines “ethically uncontroversial.” [\[Aleteia, 11/18/20\]](#)

A Texas Bishop Disputed The Morality Of Moderna’s COVID-19 Vaccine, Claiming That Aborted Fetuses Were Used In The Vaccine’s Development. “While the Bishop of Tyler asserted Monday that the coronavirus vaccine being developed by Moderna “is not morally produced”, the National Catholic Bioethics Center and the Charlotte Lozier Institute have reached a contrary conclusion, saying the vaccine’s production is not ethically problematic. Bishop Joseph Strickland tweeted Nov. 16 that “Unborn children died in abortions and then their bodies were used as ‘laboratory specimens’. I urge all who believe in the sanctity of life to reject a vaccine which has been produced immorally.” [\[Catholic Telegraph, 11/18/20\]](#)

- **He Urged Other Anti-Abortion Advocates To Reject The Vaccine.** “On Tuesday, Some anti-abortion partisans questioned the ethics of a promising coronavirus vaccine, voicing fears that the treatment was developed using the cell lines of aborted fetuses. Joseph Strickland, the Catholic bishop in Tyler, Texas, said that the vaccine candidate, produced by the company Moderna, was not created “morally.” “Unborn children died in abortions and then their bodies were used as ‘laboratory specimens,’” he [tweeted](#). “I urge all who believe in the sanctity of life to reject a vaccine which has been produced immorally. “After receiving significant backlash, Strickland, who is a prominent voice for conservative Catholics, claimed that the vaccine was developed with tests involving the cell lines of aborted fetuses.” [\[Washington Examiner, 11/17/20\]](#)

The Anti-Abortion Charlotte Lozier Institute Posits The Vaccine Is “Ethically Uncontroversial”. “But the Charlotte Lozier Institute, research arm of the pro-life Susan B. Anthony List, has listed the Moderna vaccine among the “ethically uncontroversial CoV-19 vaccine programs.” Moderna recently announced that a trial of its vaccine demonstrated it to be 94.5% effective. The trial involved 30,000 people, half of whom were given two doses of the vaccine, and half a placebo. In the trial, 95 people developed symptoms of Covid-19; five of them had received the vaccine, while 90 had received the placebo. None of those vaccinated developed severe cases of the disease. The company plans to apply soon for approval to use the vaccine in the US. Moderna’s vaccine is based on the virus’ RNA, and uses a spike protein, or peplomer, from SARS-CoV-2 rather than cell lines derived from aborted fetuses.” [\[Catholic Telegraph, 11/18/20\]](#)

- Charlotte Lozier Institute’s David Prentice Elaborated On His Own Perceived Morality Of The Vaccines.** “David Prentice, research director of the Charlotte Lozier Institute, an anti-abortion think tank, told the *Washington Examiner* that the drug, while "tainted" with the commonality of abortion's involvement with medical research, did not pose significant moral quandaries because its production "was not an instance of testing with fresh, aborted fetal tissue or any new cells. "The same is true of the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, Prentice said. Fetal stem cells were not used in the production of either vaccine. They are considered "ethical" by the group, which has been scrutinizing vaccine treatments since Trump kicked off Operation Warp Speed earlier this year. Like Trump's treatment, however, both were involved in tests using material taken from decades old aborted fetal cell lines. In June, the Trump administration placed restrictions on the use of new aborted matter in research.” [[Washington Examiner, 11/17/20](#)]

Some Of The Controversy Surrounding COVID-19 Stems From Conspiracy Theories Sprouted In An Anti-Vaccination Facebook Group. “An effective COVID-19 vaccine is likely to be key in bringing the pandemic to heel. However, that hasn’t stopped some social media users from spreading false claims about various vaccine candidates. One of these claims originated in a Facebook video posted by the anti-vaccination group We Are Vaxxed. The video, broadcast live on Nov. 15, claims that the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Oxford University and the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca contains cells from an aborted male fetus. “CONFIRMED- aborted Male fetus in Covid 19 vaccine,” reads the title that appears above the video on Facebook. The video shows the packaging for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine while an offscreen narrator breaks down what led her to conclude that the vaccine contains aborted fetal tissue. The narrator then shows a screen grab from a scientific study of the vaccine. The narrator reads aloud one portion of the text where the authors describe analyzing the vaccine in "MRC-5 and A549 cell lines." The video then shows the Wikipedia page for MRC-5 cell lines. The narrator points out that the cell line was originally developed from research "deriving lung tissue of a 14-week-old aborted Caucasian male fetus. ""There you have it peeps," she says. "One thing (this vaccine) definitely has is the lung tissue of a 14-week-old aborted Caucasian male fetus. "The post, which has been viewed over 150,000 times, was flagged as part of Facebook’s efforts to combat false news and misinformation on its News Feed.” [[Politifact.com, 11/18/20](#)]

The Conspiracy Theories Were Disclaimed By Scientist And AstraZeneca Representatives. “As the video points out, MRC-5 was created when a cell isolated from an aborted fetus was multiplied to produce a "cell line" of the same genetic makeup. The MRC-5 cells were obtained in 1966 from a 14-week-old fetus electively aborted in the United Kingdom. According to Jenny Hursit, an AstraZeneca spokesperson, the company didn’t use the MRC-5 cell line to develop the vaccine. David Matthews, a scientist at the University of Bristol and a co-author of the study cited in the video, told us that the narrator misleadingly summarized his paper. "This paper looked at how the Oxford vaccine behaves when it is inside a genetically normal human cell. The vaccine is NOT itself made in MRC-5 cells," he wrote in an email. Matthews explained that he and his colleagues were attempting to analyze the effectiveness of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine before it was tested on humans. To achieve this goal, researchers at Oxford and the University of Bristol injected the vaccine into the MRC-5 cell line to see how it reacted in human cells.” [[Politifact.com, 11/18/20](#)]

February 2021: Pharmaceutical Company Johnson & Johnson Announced Public Availability Of Their COVID-19 Vaccine

In Late February 2021, Johnson & Johnson Announced That The FDA Had Issued Emergency Authorization Use For Its Single-Dose COVID-19 Vaccine

On February 27, 2021, Johnson & Johnson Announced The FDA Had Issued Emergency Authorization For Their COVID-19 Vaccine. “Johnson & Johnson (NYSE: JNJ) (the Company) today announced that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for its single-dose COVID-19 vaccine, developed by the Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson, to prevent COVID-19 in individuals 18 years of age and older. This decision was based on the totality of scientific evidence, including data from the Phase 3 ENSEMBLE study that demonstrated the vaccine was 85 percent effective in preventing severe disease across all regions studied, and showed protection against COVID-19 related hospitalization and death, beginning 28 days after vaccination. The terms of the EUA allow use of the vaccine while more data are gathered. The Company plans to file for a Biologics License Application (BLA) with the FDA later in 2021.” [[Johnson & Johnson, 2/27/21](#)]

The Johnson & Johnson Vaccine Is Unique In That It Only Requires One Dose. “One big reason to be excited about the new [Johnson & Johnson vaccine for Covid-19](#), which was authorized by the Food and Drug Administration over the weekend for emergency use in the US: Unlike the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines already in use, it requires only one shot for full protection. That’s a big deal. From a practical standpoint, it means that the new vaccine could really speed up America’s vaccination campaign — certainly more than another two-dose vaccine would. It also fixes a problem that’s long bedeviled medical treatments that require multiple doses: A lot of patients tend to drop off after the first appointment.” [[Vox, 3/1/21](#)]

Shortly After Johnson & Johnson’s Announcement, The U.S. Conference Of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) And Other Catholic Leaders Directed Catholics To Avoid The Vaccine Due To The Use Of Human Fetal Tissue During Vaccine Development

The U.S Conference Of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Issued A Statement Urging Catholics To Avoid Johnson & Johnson’s Vaccine. “On Tuesday, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops [urged](#) Catholics to avoid taking the Johnson & Johnson [coronavirus](#) vaccine and to choose alternatives from Pfizer or Moderna instead because Johnson & Johnson used cells derived decades ago from an abortion to create the vaccine.” [[Washington Post, 3/2/21](#)]

The USCCB Statement Elevated Ideology Over Science To Dissuade People From Getting The J&J Vaccine—Despite Clear Public Health Advantages To The One-Dose Shot

The USCCB Statement Contained Biased Rhetoric Employed By Anti-Science, Anti-Abortion Groups. “On March 2, Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Doctrine, and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City in Kansas, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities, issued a statement on the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine recently approved for use in the United States. “The approval of Johnson & Johnson’s COVID-19 vaccine for use in the United States again raises questions about the moral permissibility of using vaccines developed, tested, and/or produced with the help of abortion-derived cell lines. “Pfizer and Moderna’s vaccines raised concerns because an abortion-derived cell line was used for testing them, but not in their production. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine, however, was developed, tested and is produced with abortion-derived cell lines raising additional moral concerns. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has judged 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.’[1] 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.” [\[USCCB, 3/2/21\]](#)

The USCCB Statement Ignores The Strategic Advantage Of The Johnson & Johnson Vaccine Compared To Moderna And Pfizer. “The Johnson & Johnson vaccine offers a [strategic advantage](#) to a vaccine rollout as demand continues to outweigh supply. Not only does the one-shot dose allow for quicker and more widespread inoculations, it can be stored in a regular refrigerator for months.” [\[Washington Post, 3/2/21\]](#)

The Archdiocese of New Orleans And St. Louis Catholic Leaders Issued Statements Directing Catholics To Avoid The Johnson & Johnson Vaccine Due To The Use Of Human Fetal Tissue During Its Development. “The [archdiocese of New Orleans](#), as well as Roman Catholic leaders in St Louis, Missouri, have told local Catholics to avoid the Johnson & Johnson’s single-shot Covid-19 vaccine, because its early development used “morally compromised cell lines created from two abortions... The archdiocese of St Louis on Tuesday, meanwhile, encouraged Catholics to seek out the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines and avoid the Johnson & Johnson version if possible. Like the New Orleans archdiocese statement, the St Louis statement called the Johnson & Johnson vaccine “morally compromised”. However, the St Louis statement stressed that Catholics can get that vaccine “in good conscience if no other alternative is available”. Cells derived from an elective abortion in the Netherlands in the 1970s are commonly used in medical research.” [\[Guardian, 3/2/21\]](#)

- **These Directives Contradicted Statements Issued By The Pope Regarding COVID-19 Vaccinations.** “The leadership in New Orleans said two other vaccines in use in the US, made by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, were acceptable despite having been developed with ‘some lab testing that utilised the abortion-derived cell line’. The archdiocese made the [announcement](#) on Friday. The statement put the archdiocese at odds with Pope Francis. In December, [the Vatican said](#) it was ‘morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process’, as the use of such vaccines ‘does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion from which the cells used in production of the vaccines derive’.” [\[Guardian, 3/2/21\]](#)

The Johnson & Johnson Vaccine Did Rely On Use Of Cell Lines Derived From Human Fetal Tissue, As Have Other Critical Scientific Developments

Human Cell Lines Were Used To Grow Adenovirus Used During Johnson & Johnson’s Vaccine Development. “The Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccine uses an adenovirus, a benign common cold virus, to introduce genetic instructions for the spike protein to the body. From there, the process for the immune system is similar to the process for the mRNA vaccines. Growing the adenovirus to produce the vaccine requires cells. Scientists use fetal cell lines to grow the adenovirus because those type of cell lines rapidly replicate outside the human body. Experts say that by the time the adenovirus goes in the vial, the cells from the fetal cell lines have been rigorously filtered out. “Once the virus particles are made from those cells, there are processes of filtration to try and purify what's going to be in the vial, so it's unlikely that there are going to be any cell remnants that passed through that filtering process, that purification

process," said Adalja. So we can Verify: Fetal cell lines were used to manufacture and develop the Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. Lacasse says fetal cell lines were also used to produce the hepatitis A, rubella, chickenpox, and shingles vaccines." [\[KSDK, 3/2/21\]](#)

Johnson & Johnson Issued A Statement Which Explained The Immortalized Cells Were Used During Vaccine Development And Are Not Present In The Vaccine Itself. "While not disputing the church officials' contention that an abortion-derived cell line is used in the production, Johnson & Johnson issued a statement Tuesday stressing that there is no fetal tissue in its vaccine. Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine is made using a harmless cold virus, called an adenovirus, the same technology it used to produce a successful Ebola vaccine. The adenovirus is grown using what's called an immortalized cell line, and the virus then is pulled out and purified. Several types of cell lines created decades ago using fetal tissue exist and are widely used in medical manufacturing but the cells in them today are clones of the early cells, not the original tissue." [\[Associated Press, 3/2/21\]](#)