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## COVID-19 Vaccines

### A Statement of the Physicians Resource Council of Focus on the Family

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As of late 2020 there have been more than 74 million reported cases of COVID-19 globally, with more than 1.6 million deaths worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

While much is still unknown about the disease, our understanding of ways to treat and prevent it continues to grow. One widely anticipated means of reducing the spread of COVID-19 and helping society move back toward normalcy is the development of a vaccine.

Vaccines work by taking a part of a virus or bacteria (known as an antigen) and presenting it to the body's immune system so that it stimulates an immune response. Antigens can be introduced directly, using killed or weakened viruses, or through molecules like mRNA which provide instructions for cells in our bodies to produce the antigen. These antigens prime the immune system so that when it encounters a particular invader, such as a virus, it "remembers" it and is ready to mount a rapid defense.

It is hoped that vaccines will prove effective in curtailing the spread of COVID-19, although there are still many questions about them. While reports of safety and efficacy for recently authorized vaccines are promising, a concern that is often discussed in the pro-life community relates to the use of aborted fetal cell lines in the development and manufacturing of vaccines.

Two fetal cell lines that are being used in the development and production of several COVID-19 vaccines are HEK293 and PER.C6. HEK293 was derived from a fetus that was aborted in 1972. PER.C6 was isolated from an abortion that occurred in 1985. (No ongoing abortions need to be performed for these cell lines to be maintained.)

The good news is that some pharmaceutical companies are working on vaccines that *do not rely in any way* on aborted fetal cell lines. Others are making vaccines that are *not produced in aborted fetal cell lines*, although these cell lines have been used for certain testing purposes. These manufacturers include Moderna, along with Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, whose mRNA vaccines are synthesized in the lab and are not produced using cells of any kind.<sup>ii</sup>

Unfortunately, aborted fetal cell lines are being used by some vaccine manufacturers in the development and production of COVID-19 vaccines. These include, but are not limited to, the vaccine made by Johnson & Johnson and its subsidiary Janssen, which uses PER.C6, and AstraZeneca's vaccine, using HEK293.

The use of these cell lines is a matter of ethical concern to many people of pro-life conviction, and has made some hesitant to accept vaccines produced using fetal cell lines.

Human life, from conception to natural death, should be treated as sacred and never be devalued. Vaccine manufacturing, following the best ethical practices, should not have to rely on abortion at all. The Physicians Resource Council of Focus on the Family expresses its gratitude to those vaccine developers that do not use aborted fetal cell lines, and calls upon all manufacturers to use methods and technologies that value life.

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<sup>i</sup> See <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>. Accessed 12/17/2020.

<sup>ii</sup> For information about various vaccines and the cell lines used to produce them, refer to the Charlotte Lozier Institute's information sheet (<https://lozierinstitute.org/update-covid-19-vaccine-candidates-and-abortion-derived-cell-lines/>)