



COVID-19 Vaccine: Special Questions for Church Leaders



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"I am convinced that fraternity is the true cure for the pandemic and the many evils that have affected us. Along with vaccines, fraternity and hope are, as it were, the medicine we need in today's world."

- Pope Francis, February 2021

As Church leaders, you may potentially face challenging questions regarding COVID-19 vaccines, but it is possible to navigate these through a focus on the common good. As explained in the [Vaccine for All: 20 Points for a Fairer and Healthier World](#) note, safeguarding life is an essential element in service of the common good, and as such, entails a deeply communal dimension. Given our deep interdependence, no one is safe until all are safe. The following information may be helpful to you when responding to challenging questions with an emphasis on promoting the common good and safeguarding the integral health of people and the natural environment.

Could you comment on the Church's position regarding vaccines that are tested and or developed using fetal cell lines?

- The Church has a long history of addressing this issue with other vaccines. The longer the pandemic continues, the more death and human suffering will occur. The Church defends life and the common good, and the vaccines that are now available are an essential tool in the fight against the pandemic. They should be embraced to both protect life and reduce suffering.
- We have a duty to protect others from infection with its danger of serious illness—and death for some—and a vaccine is the most effective way to achieve this. The approved vaccines can and should be accepted, with a clear conscience, as an act of human solidarity.
- The Pontifical Academy for Life reaffirmed in [2005](#) and [2017](#) that clinically recommended vaccinations "can be used with a clear conscience and that the use of such vaccines does not signify some sort of cooperation with voluntary abortion"; the moral responsibility is to vaccinate in order to avoid serious health risks for children and the general population. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, whose task is to promote and protect the correctness of doctrine in matters of faith and morals, issued the *Instruction Dignitas Personae on Certain Bioethical Questions* in [2008](#) and wrote at the end of [2020](#) that in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, all vaccinations recognized as clinically safe and effective may be used.

What expertise does the Pontifical Academy for Life have to make recommendations in favor of vaccination and receiving COVID-19 vaccines, as outlined in the [joint paper](#) with the Vatican COVID-19 Commission?

- Founded in 1994, the Academy is a bridge between science, faith and the world. It is dedicated to "study, information and formation on the principal problems of biomedicine and of law, relative to the promotion and defense of life, above all in the direct relation that they have with Christian morality and the directives of the Church's Magisterium." The Academy is a valuable source of objective scientific information made available to the Holy See and a wider public in cooperation with the international scientific and medical community.
- The Academy does not work in isolation but is linked to various other dicasteries of the Roman Curia, including the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, a partner on the vaccine issue.
- The work of the Academy is also informed by the expertise of its partners, including epidemiologists, experts in pandemic response, and others with deep experience in global public health.

We hear conflicting information in the media about vaccines and talk about conspiracy theories. What are we supposed to believe?

- The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a parallel pandemic of misleading and fabricated information. Rumors, in the form of conspiracy theories, including about how the virus can be cured and who is to blame for its spread, are rampant. Like the virus, misinformation can spread quickly. It is also harmful and complicates COVID-19 pandemic response efforts.
- It is important to follow the advice of trusted sources, including local public health authorities and the websites of relevant regional and international organisations, such as the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#) and the [World Health Organization](#). Individuals can also help by not sharing unverified information that comes from dubious sources.
- As the Holy Father reminds us, "social aggression has found unparalleled room for expansion through computers and mobile devices," which "has now given free rein to ideologies," blocking "the kind of serene reflection that could lead us to a shared wisdom" and preventing us from penetrating "to the heart of matters, and to recognize what is essential to give meaning to our lives" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 44-45; 50). Yet we can, together, "seek the truth in dialogue," through "the process of building fraternity be it local or universal... by spirits that are free and open to authentic encounters" (*ibid.* 50).

What does the coronavirus have to do with bats, wildlife and the ecological crisis?

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in people and many different species of animals. While evidence suggests that the SARS CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19, most likely originated in bats, the exact source of the virus has not yet been identified. The increased risk of emerging infectious diseases such as COVID-19 can be linked to human interference in the intricate balance of natural ecosystems. The rapid destruction of the Earth's life-sustaining ecosystems and biodiversity through wildlife trading, deforestation, mining, logging and agriculture, is increasing the danger of new and possibly deadlier viruses evolving to infect humans. If we fail to rebalance our relationship with the environment and wildlife, more pandemics of this scale are likely to follow.
- "Everything is connected" as Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. If we are to emerge from the crisis better than before, we need to rethink our relationship with the environment and care for our common home.