



The Morality of Vaccinating Our Children

"The Pontifical Academy of Life document reaches a different conclusion, namely, that even when a vaccine is made from aborted material, and when no other form of that vaccine exists, parents may indeed vaccinate their children."



Many parents wonder whether they should be vaccinating their children if the vaccines are produced in ways that involve the use of cells derived from an abortion performed 30 or 40 years ago. The Pontifical Academy for Life in Rome has addressed this topic in one of its documents from 2005.

To make a vaccine, it is often necessary to use a *cell line*, these are special cells that can be grown endlessly in the lab. Cell lines are different from regular body cells which may grow for a total of 70 or 80 doublings during a person's lifetime before they run out of steam and die. Because cell lines grow practically forever, they are widely used in many research labs around the world. These lines can be obtained in morally acceptable ways, or in immoral ways.

In most cases, the use of these cells is not controversial. As a graduate student, I used a cell line obtained from a cancer that had been surgically removed from a 4 year old girl in 1970. The use of these cells did not raise any moral red flags, since the cancer had been removed for medical reasons, and

since informed consent could be obtained from the girl's parents to use the cells for research. On the other hand, using cell lines derived from fetuses after an induced abortion raises vexing moral problems.

Informed consent cannot be validly obtained. It's clearly not possible to ask fetuses themselves whether their tissues may be used after they are terminated, and the parents cannot give valid consent either. Parental consent given on behalf of a child always implies that parents have the best interests of that child in mind. Parents who choose abortion prove by that very fact that they no longer have the best interests of their child in mind, and they consequently lose the ability to give valid informed consent for the use of their own child's organs or mortal remains.

Thus vaccines should not be prepared using cell lines from aborted fetuses. Nevertheless, a number of vaccines have been prepared in this way by various pharmaceutical companies, using cell lines from abortions that

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happened 30 or 40 years ago. In some cases, these vaccines are the only ones available to inoculate against particular diseases, for example, chicken pox and rubella.

Some parents worry that it seems immoral to vaccinate their children using vaccines made in this way. The Pontifical Academy of Life document reaches a different conclusion, namely, that even when a vaccine is made from aborted material, and when no other form of that vaccine exists, parents may indeed vaccinate their children. In fact, in many instances, parents should feel a strong obligation to do so, considering the gravity and severity of the diseases involved. The document also stresses that parents and others must apply pressure to pharmaceutical companies to reformulate their vaccines in lines from non-objectionable sources. If such alternatives already exist, parents should request that their doctors try to use those vaccines instead. Why, then, may parents morally choose to vaccinate their children with vaccines derived from aborted

material if this is the only source available?

1. Because by doing so, they are not involved in any illicit form of cooperation with the original abortion. Many Catholic experts concur that cooperation today is not really possible in an event that was over and done with many years ago. Because the abortion occurred long ago, and for reasons completely unrelated to vaccines, it is untenable to conclude that vaccine recipients today somehow cooperate in the original abortive event.

2. Because any risk of scandal which may arise when Catholics use these vaccines can be reasonably minimized by various steps. Scandal can be caused by doing something which has the appearance of evil, even if it is not in fact evil. Those who choose to be vaccinated may provide the appearance of evil because of the remote abortion link, and others may take scandal from their decision. Traditionally, the remedy for this has involved educating those who might take scandal by, for

example, explaining:

- the facts about vaccines
- the lack of any illicit cooperation on the part of the parents
- the parents' frustration (even anger) regarding the lack of alternative, morally-derived vaccines
- the upright intentions of the parents and their concern for their children's health

When this education is coupled with efforts to pressure pharmaceutical companies to reformulate their problematic vaccines in morally acceptable ways, the issue of scandal diminishes and moves into the background.

3. Because vaccinations are critical to preventing very serious, life-threatening diseases, and to safeguarding large segments of the population from cataclysmic outbreaks and epidemics.

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