

Dear Religious Leader:

As a spiritual leader for your community, you are charged with guiding your congregation along the right path. Every day, you lead them and provide insight on personal, professional, and public matters that impact their mental and physical well-being.

One often overlooked danger is the risk of contagious diseases, like whooping cough, measles, and flu. In a place where people of all ages gather together to worship, study, celebrate and seek solace or comfort, illness may be quickly and unknowingly spread; infants, children and adults can easily infect each other with these dangerous illnesses. Thankfully, this risk can be greatly reduced if children, parents, and religious staff are fully immunized.

We are reaching out to you as part of the Northern Michigan Vaccine Preventable Disease Task Force. Local health departments are no longer permitted to discuss religious concerns related to vaccination when counseling a parent who is seeking to waive vaccine(s) for their child(ren). Individuals or families with doctrine-related questions about vaccines will be encouraged to seek out the guidance and perspective from their clergy on these matters. Therefore, with representatives from Munson Medical Center, the regional Health Departments, and community stakeholders, we have created a Toolkit for Religious Leaders. We hope this resource will help increase your awareness of potential objections regarding vaccination, as well as promote thoughtful discussion with respect to religious views. Common questions that your congregation may be struggling with include ethical dilemmas associated with using human tissue cells to create vaccines, the idea that the body should not receive certain chemicals, or becoming immune by natural means without medical intervention. As a spiritual leader, you may be looked to for interpretation of religious texts for personal advice on decision making, or as a mentor for those that may experience doubts of conscience following illness or vaccination.

Please use this toolkit to help guide your parishioners on immunizations against the various contagious diseases. You can also educate parents about the risks of having an unvaccinated child.

Thank you for caring for our community. We hope you will find this Toolkit helpful in your mission and appreciate any opportunities for respectful dialogue. If you have any questions, please contact your local health department.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael Collins
Medical Director
Grand Traverse County
Health Department



Dr. Joshua Meyerson
Medical Director
Benzie-Leelanau District
Health Department and
Health Department of
Northwest Michigan



Dr. Jennifer Morse
Medical Director
District Health
Department #10

The Importance of Vaccination in Your Congregation

Immunization is the process in which your immune system fights off disease-causing organisms (bacteria and viruses) by creating antibodies that will attack and destroy any germs that invade the body. Antibodies are certain proteins that will recognize specific antigens (bacteria or virus). In order for the immune system to produce these antibodies, your body must be exposed to the bacteria or virus. This can be done by having direct exposure to disease or receiving a vaccine. Direct exposure to a disease is very risky and can lead to serious illness or even death.

Vaccination is one of the most effective and safe methods of protecting your children from many serious and dangerous infectious diseases. With this approach, your body is introduced with a weakened or inactive form of the disease. This will trigger your immune system into thinking that the body is under attack from this disease. As a result, your immune system will produce the necessary antibodies to protect against future attacks. Vaccinating before potential exposure to a disease is vital to reduce any risk or complications from the disease itself. For example, you receive the flu vaccine in the fall before flu season starts or a newborn receives vaccines against whooping cough at 2 months old before increased exposure from other children.

Why Are Vaccines Important to Your Congregation?

By encouraging vaccination in your congregation, you not only are protecting them from dangerous diseases, you are protecting others in the community and those your congregation serves. This includes children and adults that cannot receive vaccinations for medical reasons. This special group of people rely on others to protect them from vaccine-preventable diseases. If the majority of the community is immunized, then the risk of a disease spreading is minimal to none. Even if one child does get sick, the disease will most likely not spread due to the immunity of others.

However, if enough people choose not to vaccinate their children then community immunity will quickly decrease. This will allow the disease an opportunity to spread and infect others, which could cause an outbreak. That is why it is important for children to get vaccinated. As a member of the community, you can take an active role in helping educate your congregation in addressing some of the benefits, risks, and concerns your parishioners may have regarding vaccinating themselves and family members.

Benefits of Vaccinations

- Vaccinations have reduced the number of infections from vaccine-preventable diseases by more than 90%.ⁱ
- Vaccines can prevent common infections, like whooping cough (pertussis).
- Vaccines prevent diseases that can easily resurface, like measles or mumps.
- Vaccines prevent infections that have been eliminated in the United States but are still common in other parts of the world, like polio and diphtheria. We are a global community now, so outbreaks of these diseases are still possible.
- Vaccines help develop immunity to a disease, but will not cause infection so a child or adult does not get sick.

What Are The Risks With Not Vaccinating?

If the immunization rates decline, even a little, herd immunity decreases. This can cause an outbreak of diseases that we do not regularly see in the United States. Herd immunity is when most people in a community are protected, the disease probably will not spread. This helps protect people who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons. Even though we do not see or experience many vaccine-preventable diseases, we still can be exposed to them because we live in a global community now. Other nations have not yet eliminated diseases we no longer see here in the United States.

There are also serious risks if someone is exposed to a vaccine-preventable disease. In northern Michigan, in the last 5 years, there have been reported cases and outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases. *Pertussis*, known as whooping cough, is spread through the air. There was an outbreak of whooping cough in Northern Michigan in 2013. It can cause such bad coughing spells, babies who have it cannot breathe. *Measles* is very contagious and can be spread easily. Recently, measles was also reported in Leelanau County. Measles can cause pneumonia, seizures, brain damage and death. A *varicella* outbreak (i.e. chicken pox) was reported in one Grand Traverse County school. Chicken pox is very contagious and can cause a blister-like rash, fever, and fatigue.

Frequently Asked Questions

The following are some potential answers to several commonly asked questions about vaccines.

1. What are the risks and benefits of vaccines?

Vaccines can prevent infectious diseases that once killed or harmed many infants, children, and adults. Without vaccines, your child is at risk for getting seriously ill and suffering pain, disability, and even death from diseases like measles and whooping cough. There are side effects with vaccines. This side effects are usually mild (redness and swelling at the injection site) and go away within a few days. Serious side effects following vaccination, such as severe allergic reaction, are very rare and doctors and clinic staff are trained to deal with them.

2. Are vaccines safe?

Yes. Vaccines are very safe. The United States' long-standing vaccine safety system ensures that vaccines are as safe as possible. Currently, the United States has the safest, most effective vaccine supply in its history. Millions of children are safely vaccinated each year. The most common side effects are typically very mild, such as pain or swelling at the injection site.

3. Is there a link between vaccines and autism?

No. Scientific studies and reviews continued to show no relationship between vaccines and autism. The rates of children who have autism are the same between those that are unvaccinated and who have received vaccines. Some people have suggested that thimerosal (a compound that contains mercury) might be a cause of autism. It was removed in 2001

from child vaccines and there has been an increase in autism rates since 2001. Others have suggested that the MMR (measles- mumps-rubella) vaccine may be linked to autism. However, numerous scientists and researchers have studied and continue to study the MMR vaccine and thimerosal, and reach the same conclusion: that there is no link between them and autism.

4. Why do vaccines start so early?

The recommended schedule is designed to protect infants and children by providing immunity early in life, before they are exposed to life-threatening diseases. Children are immunized early because they are susceptible to diseases at a young age, and the consequences of these diseases can be very serious, and even life-threatening, for infants and young children.

5. What are combination vaccines? Why are they used?

Combination vaccines protect your child against more than one disease with a single shot. They reduce the number of shots and office visits your child would need, which not only saves you time and money, but also is easier on your child.

6. Can't I just wait until my child goes to school to catch up on immunizations?

Before entering school, young children can be exposed to vaccine-preventable diseases from parents and other adults, brothers and sisters, on a plane, at child care, or even at the grocery store. Children under age 5 are especially susceptible to diseases because their immune systems have not built up the necessary defenses to fight infection. Don't wait to protect your baby and risk getting these diseases when he or she needs protection now.

7. Fetal Tissue Use

“Only two fetuses obtained from abortions of maternal choice” (College of Physicians of Philadelphia) provide cell strains used in vaccine development. None of the abortions were conducted for vaccine development. The fetal cells were only used to begin the cell line over 40 years ago. The cell lines have since developed independently, never forming a part of a fetus' body. The cell lines used in vaccines today are not the cells of the aborted fetuses. No new fetal cell lines have been used or added.

If you are interested in more information, visit these trusted organizations:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#)
- [Immunization Action Coalition](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics.](#)
- [The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia](#)
- [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Every Child By Two.](#)

Overview on Religions' View and Position on Vaccinations

Here is a brief summary on various religious organizations' stance on vaccines and immunizations.

Religion	View/Position/Stance
Roman Catholic Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes the importance of vaccinations and their use in the fight against infectious disease to protect both the individual and the larger community. • Advocates the use of alternatives, if available, of certain viral vaccines manufactured from cells of aborted fetuses.^{1,3}
Christianity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many denominations of Christian Faiths that do not object to vaccinations, including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eastern Orthodox ○ Oriental Orthodox ○ Anglican (including Episcopalian) ○ Baptist ○ Congregational ○ Lutheran ○ Methodist (including African Methodist Episcopal) ○ Presbyterian ⁵
Amish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vaccination is not officially prohibited; minority of parents who do not vaccinate their children is based on concerns over the potential side effects rather than religious beliefs. • Low vaccination rates are due to lack of knowledge of benefits, distrust over safety, or religious reasons (putting faith in man over God).¹
Judaism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many rabbis have spoken out in favor of vaccinations noting the importance of preserving life. According to Jewish law, there is no objection to porcine or other animal-derived ingredients in non-oral products, such as vaccines.¹
Jehovah's Witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No formal objection to vaccinations.¹ • The Watch Tower Society has instructed its followers to refuse transfusions of whole blood and certain blood components, which they consider a violation of God's law. Therefore, JW's used to denounce vaccinations during the 1920s – 1940s. Took a more neutral stance in 1960s. Not until 1990s that vaccines was seen as a clinical value.⁴
Christian Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief in the promotion of healing through prayer rather than by use of medicine; hence, many oppose to vaccinations.^{1,3}

Religion	View/Position/Stance
Islamic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many Islamic leaders have issued statements indicating that vaccination is consistent with Islamic principles. A 1995 conference of Islamic scholars concluded, “The transformation of pork products into gelatin alters them sufficiently to make it permissible for observant Muslims to receive vaccines containing pork gelatin.”¹ • Some Islamic communities, such as the Nation of Islam (NOI), oppose vaccinations; NOI leader mentioned that the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine was designed to kill people.^{1,6}
Hindu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No formal statements from Hindu organizations and sects; each sect has own rules and traditions. Large Hindu practicing areas, such as India, has taken proactive efforts to eradicate vaccine preventable diseases.¹
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-Saints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports childhood vaccinations for over 30 years. A July 1978 First Presidency letter “urged members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-Saints to protect their own children through immunization” ... “Failure to act could subject untold thousands to preventable lifelong physical or mental impairment, including paralysis, blindness, deafness, heart damage and mental retardation.”²
Buddhist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddhism has no central authority that determines doctrine. Vaccination is widely accepted in predominantly Buddhist countries.⁵

To order additional guides, please contact Munson Community Health at 231-935-9255

Sources

1. Every Child by Two. (n.d.). Religious Views of Vaccination At-A-Glance. *Vaccinate Your Baby*. Retrieved from http://www.vaccinateyourbaby.org/pdfs/religion_at_a_glance.pdf
2. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-Saints. (July 1978). Immunize Children, Leaders Urge. *Liahona*. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/liahona/1978/07/immunize-children-leaders-urge?lang=eng>
3. The College of Physicians of Philadelphia. (June 2016). Cultural Perspectives on Vaccination. *The History of Vaccines*. Retrieved from <http://www.historyofvaccines.org/content/articles/cultural-perspectives-vaccination>
4. Grabenstein, J. (April 2013). What the World's religions teach, applied to vaccines and immune globulins. *Vaccine*. Vol. 31, Issue 16 (pp 2011-2023). Retrieved from <http://www.childrenshealthcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Vaccine-Grabenstein-article.pdf>
5. Vanderbilt Health and Wellness. (August 2013). Immunizations and Religion. *Occupational Health Clinic: From the Resource Library*. Retrieved from <http://healthandwellness.vanderbilt.edu/news/2013/08/immunizations-and-religion/>
6. United Press International, Inc. (October 2009). Farrakhan Suspicious of H1N1 Vaccine. Retrieved from http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2009/10/19/Farrakhan-suspicious-of-H1N1-vaccine/UPI-63931256011008/
7. CDC. (April 2016). Infant Immunizations FAQs. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/parent-questions.html>; Tri-County Medical Society Alliance. Deciphering Facts and Myths About Childhood Immunizations, 2014.
9. The College of Physicians of Philadelphia. A History of Vaccines. Retrieved from <http://www.historyofvaccines.org/content/articles/human-cell-strains-vaccine-development>

Appendix A

Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Fetuses

A Statement of the Catholic Medical Association

The Catholic Medical Association provides these comments and recommendations regarding a recent statement commissioned by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and prepared by the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAFL; *“Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses”* *) in order to carry on its mission of upholding the truth of the Catholic Faith in the science and practice of medicine.

The development and utilization of vaccines which effectively reduce and hopefully, eventually eradicate certain infectious diseases afflicting mankind is a *“milestone”* * of modern medical technology. The Catholic Church supports all morally legitimate means that medical science uses to prevent and alleviate suffering related to human illness. However, circumstances have arisen in which development and /or application of certain medical techniques, even though effective, are morally illicit and must be condemned and actively opposed. The recent statement of the PAFL addresses ethical questions regarding the *“lawfulness of production, distribution and use of certain vaccines whose production is connected with acts of procured abortion.”* *

An ethical problem exists today because some vaccines for rubella (Meruvax), Hepatitis A, (VAQTA, HAVRIX) as well as others, are derived from cell lines originally prepared from tissue taken from voluntarily aborted fetuses. The question is to what degree do those who participate in production, distribution or use of these vaccines *“cooperate in evil.”* * A brief consideration of the moral principles regarding cooperation led the authors of the document to several specific conclusions:

1. As regards every form of formal cooperation, it is always morally illicit and whoever participates by approving of, or sharing the intention in, the performance of voluntary abortion to procure tissue with the aim of producing vaccines, actually participates in the same grave moral evil as the one who performed the abortion.
2. As regards the preparation, distribution and marketing of these vaccines, this activity is morally illicit, because *“it could contribute in encouraging the performance of other voluntary abortions, with the purpose of producing such vaccines.”* * Therefore, those contributing to this activity, depending on the degree of their involvement in the activity and the gravity of their reasons for this involvement, may be guilty of immoral material cooperation - even when they are not formally cooperating.
3. As regards those physicians or patients who use these vaccines, even knowing their origin, they are permitted to use the vaccines when no effective alternative is available, and as necessary to avoid *“significant risks to their health”* and *“indirectly the [health of the] population as a whole.”* Such a choice *“occurs in a context of moral coercion...[they are] forced to choose to act against their conscience...This is an unjust alternative choice, which must be eliminated as soon as possible.”* *

Following the explanation regarding degrees of cooperation, there is a clear directive which obliges all of us *“to oppose by all means the vaccines which do not yet have morally acceptable alternatives, creating pressure so that alternative vaccines are prepared.”*^{*}

Based on this and other analysis of this issue from a Catholic moral perspective, the Catholic Medical Association makes the following recommendations to ensure that vaccines produced in ethically acceptable ways (hereinafter referred to as “alternative vaccines”) are made available as soon as possible.

1. When alternative vaccines are available, they must be used in place of those produced by immoral means.
2. When no alternative vaccines are available *“it is right [permissible] to abstain from using these vaccines if it can be done without causing children, and indirectly the population as a whole, to undergo significant risks to their health.”*^{*} In forming their conscience, parents should be aware that there is no absolute guarantee that an unvaccinated child will not expose a non immune pregnant woman to risk of infection with rubella.
3. When no alternative vaccines are available, it must be reaffirmed that the use of vaccines whose production is connected with acts of procured abortion is lawful *“on a temporary basis”*^{*} and *“insomuch as is necessary”*^{*} to avoid significant risk to the health of an individual or the community.
4. When no alternative vaccines are available, there is a *“moral duty to continue to fight and to employ every lawful means”*^{*} to pressure the pharmaceutical industry, government authorities and national health systems to make ethical alternatives available. Immediate action should include petitioning the FDA to allow for licensing and importation of safe and effective ethical alternative vaccines such as Takahashi (rubella) and Aimugen (Hepatitis A). In addition, we encourage accurate labeling and informed consent for the use of all vaccines derived from cell lines connected with acts of procured abortion.

Finally, the Catholic Medical Association actively seeks to cooperate with all individuals and organizations in this effort to ensure all citizens the availability of morally acceptable vaccines. We believe a strong and united alliance for ethical health care is essential in an era of rapidly advancing medical technology to secure our freedom to act in accord with upright conscience.

^{*} “Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses” Pontifical Academy for Life, June 2005.

ⁱ American Academy of Pediatrics. (November 2015). Why Immunize Your Child. *Healthychildren.org*. Retrieved from <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Why-Immunize-Your-Child.aspx>