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|  | **Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions** |

# Briefing paper for LCA leadership

# COVID-19 Ethical Issues – Vaccination

1. **Will there be a COVID-19 vaccine?**

Effective and safe vaccines take time to develop. The oft quoted time range is 12-18 months as a minimum. Of course, it depends on the type of vaccine.

There has never been a successful vaccine developed for a corona virus affecting human beings (e.g. in particular for the most serious and notable corona viruses SARS 2003, MERS 2012) [[1]](#footnote-1).

Many other corona viruses cause mild illness, mainly upper respiratory tract infections, otherwise called ‘the common cold’. In the past there has not been a great effort to develop vaccines for them. Given the severity of this corona virus pandemic, a concerted global effort may produce a different result.

## Ethical concerns

### COVID-19 vaccine production using tissue from aborted children

There are worldwide efforts to produce an effective and safe immunization(s) for COVID-19. It seems likely there may be ‘several vaccines’ working in various ways, produced by various methods.

Some pharmaceutical companies may produce a COVID-19 vaccine using ‘human cells lines’ from aborted children (or ‘foetuses’) in utero.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The most common cell lines are WI-38 (1960s), MRC-5 (1960s) and PER.C6 (1980s) cell lines from children electively aborted in the years noted. Vaccines available today using such cell lines include the Rubella component of the MMR, Hepatitis A, and varicella (chickenpox) and one of the rabies vaccines.

This is not to say that ‘human foetal tissue’ is in the vaccine given to patients. Rather such cells are used in their manufacture. However, in a recent presentation, Lutherans for Life (USA)[[3]](#footnote-3) referenced an Italian paper stating the presence of the near complete genome of human DNA sequenced from a current vaccine, Priorix-Tetra[[4]](#footnote-4). This claim is contested, however. What is not contested, is that human ‘host’ DNA fragments are present in vaccines using human foetal cells[[5]](#footnote-5).

Is using such cell lines ethical from a Christian point of view? Can a Christian make use of the fruits of an evil act? There have been several responses. Dr Megan Best (Australian Anglican medical doctor and bioethicist) makes some possibly helpful distinctions on levels of moral complicity with a wrong act. In summary she says the use of such vaccines already available is morally justifiable, given the abortions have already occurred, the cell lines already exist, and no new abortions need to occur.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, she also says there are alternatives, and Christians and church leaders should urge pharmaceutical companies and governments to use such alternatives. However, it could be said that using such vaccines that have already been made provides tacit support to pharmaceutical companies current practices and does not compel them to cease using foetal tissue.

The ‘Pontifical Academy for Life’ (2006) permitted Roman Catholics to use such vaccines only if there are no other options currently available. It called on governments and vaccine manufacturers to use other methods that do not use tissue from unborn aborted children.[[7]](#footnote-7)

My understanding is that new human cell lines are still being produced using tissue from electively aborted children in utero.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Church action

LCA leaders to encourage government authorities to promote research into, and the production of a safe, effective, ethically produced COVID-19 vaccine.

LCA leaders to urge pharmaceutical companies and governments to value the gift of all human life, especially the most vulnerable, which includes the unborn.

### Consent to vaccination

Immunisation is a medical procedure requiring consent of the recipient. Only in extraordinary circumstances (e.g. an emergency) can a medical procedure be carried out without a patient’s consent.

There is already discussion about whether a COVID-19 vaccination will be made compulsory. It is unlikely that it will be compulsory in an absolute sense. More likely it will be compulsory with qualifications, i.e. for certain occupations and activities.

Already influenza immunization has become mandatory for some occupations and activities, such as visiting residents of aged care facilities. Immunisation is already tied to eligibility to attend childcare, school and the receiving of Centrelink benefits. i.e. ‘No jab, no play’ policies.

Under what circumstances can someone be compelled to receive it, like other medical procedures?

How are Christians to respond to such legal obligations, particularly if to do so goes against Christian conscience?

Church action

Encourage church members in their various vocations to consider their responsibilities towards the life and health of others as they also care for the gift of their own bodies.

Help Christians to ‘Obey God rather than man’ (Acts 5:29) in way that also honours government as God’s authority here on earth.

### Availability, affordability and supply of a vaccine(s)

There is debate and concern about a potential COVID-19 vaccination not being made available to all people in need.[[9]](#footnote-9) Issues of intellectual property rights is involved. What reward is there for a government or pharmaceutical company to invest significant resources into researching and producing an effective, safe, and ethical vaccine?

1. Professor Ian Frazer (Australian immunologist and pioneer of the HPV vaccine) commented on this fact on this helpful ABC article, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2020-04-17/coronavirus-vaccine-ian-frazer/12146616>. The corona virus initially infects the upper respiratory tract. So initially it does not infect ‘deeply’ enough to bring about an early helpful immune response compared with other infections. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-uk-and-ireland/2020/04/bioethicists-urge-covid-19-vaccine-research-avoid-abortion-cell-lines/>  
   <https://www.lutheransforlife.org/article/innocuous-inoculations/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.intoyourhandsllc.com/download/Use-of-Aborted-Human-Fetal-Tissue-in-Vaccines.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.corvelva.it/speciale-corvelva/vaccinegate-en/vaccinegate-mrc-5-contained-in-priorix-tetra-complete-genome-sequencing.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **Yang H.** [Establishing acceptable limits of residual DNA](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23569076)**. PDA J Pharm Sci Technol 2013; 67(2):155-163.** <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23569076/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See her recent, thorough, voluminous book, *Fearfully and wonderfully made: ethics and the beginning of human life* 2012 (472-4) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. McKenna, Kyle C (2018) Use of aborted fetal tissue in vaccines and medical research obscures the value of all human life *The Linacre Quarterly vol 85(1): 13-17* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. # [Ma B](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Ma%20B%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=25803132), [He LF](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=He%20LF%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=25803132), [Zhang YL](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Zhang%20YL%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=25803132), [Chen M](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Chen%20M%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=25803132), [Wang LL](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Wang%20LL%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=25803132), [Yang HW](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Yang%20HW%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=25803132), [Yan T](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Yan%20T%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=25803132), [Sun MX](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Sun%20MX%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=25803132), [Zheng CY](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Zheng%20CY%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=25803132). *Characteristics and viral propagation properties of a new human diploid cell line, Walvax-2, and its suitability as a candidate cell substrate for vaccine production*. [Hum Vaccin Immunother.](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25803132) 2015;11(4):998-1009.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-15/coronavirus-vaccine-patent-pooled-guarantee-who/12250186> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)