



# AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

## Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement

**14 September 2020**

### **A LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL REGARDING DEVELOPMENT OF A COVID-19 VACCINE**

Friends, I take this opportunity on the Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross to share the perspective of the Catholic Church in Australia to development of a vaccine for COVID-19.

Many Catholics have sought advice from the bishops about the ethics of a vaccine, which has been discussed widely in Australia in recent weeks. Early in September I met with the Federal Health Minister to discuss vaccines for COVID-19, following a letter I wrote to the Prime Minister in July.

It was an opportunity to thank the Minister for the Government's decision to pursue a COVID-19 vaccine, and to affirm that the bishops urge the provision of ethically uncontroversial vaccines. This would encourage the best possible vaccine coverage in our population.

The development of a vaccine is vital in order to save human lives and bring the pandemic to an end. Nevertheless we have to be mindful of how vaccines are developed and discourage research that fails to respect the dignity of unborn human life.

That is why Catholic bishops around the world are advocating for ethical development of vaccines. Some vaccines have been and are being developed using cell lines of tissue derived from abortions, sometimes performed decades ago. As people of faith concerned for the common good, we cannot accept abortion, and we advocate for vaccines to be produced without reliance on human tissue derived from an abortion.

Where there is a choice, we encourage people to use a vaccine that has not been developed using human foetal cells deriving from abortion. The bishops accept that the use of an ethically compromised vaccine is acceptable if no other option is available, in order to protect lives.

A statement from the Pontifical Academy for Life in 2017 titled *Note on Italian vaccine issue* offers a summary of the ethical reasoning for this: <http://www.academyforlife.va/content/pav/en/the-academy/activity-academy/note-vaccini.html>

The Federal Government has announced agreements with two groups working on a vaccine at this stage. These are the Oxford University AstraZeneca (AZD1222) and the University of Queensland/CSL Limited (V451) vaccine projects.

The AZD1222 project is being developed using a cell line derived from kidney cells taken from a child aborted in 1972.

People have asked whether it would be permissible to use such a vaccine. If no other vaccine becomes available, the morally serious objective of protecting lives makes such a vaccine permissible.

It is our understanding that the V451 project does not use cell lines taken from an aborted child but uses a human ovarian cell line. For this reason, it appears to be an ethically acceptable option.

A vaccine can take a long time to develop and make available. As we await what we ardently hope for, we commend the Government for all it has done to protect the community, and we pray that both scientific researchers and political leaders will favour the ethical development of a vaccine, respecting human life in every circumstance.

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter A. Comensoli', with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

**Most Rev Peter A Comensoli**  
**Archbishop of Melbourne**  
**Chair, Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement**