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NZ Catholic bishops urge everyone to have a Covid-19 vaccine

The country's Catholic bishops are strongly urging their faithful and everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand to get a Covid-19 vaccine when it becomes available.

NZ Catholic Bishops Conference President, Cardinal John Dew, cited this country's 2019-20 measles epidemic and the endorsement of Covid-19 vaccines by Pope Francis as reasons the bishops are calling on everyone to get vaccinated.

Pope Francis this week lamented that some people were saying they would refuse vaccination, adding: "I believe that morally, everyone must take the vaccine. It is the moral choice because it is about your life [and] the lives of others."

Cardinal Dew said the Pope had made it clear there was no religious reason to reject vaccination, including that some vaccines were created with cell lines that originated from tissue from human fetuses aborted several decades ago.

Catholic teaching opposes abortion, but the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith office has said the "grave danger" of spreading Covid-19 outweighs those concerns when "ethically irreproachable vaccines are not available." It was "morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process." Pope Francis endorsed that statement last month, on 17 December.

Pope Francis has said he expects to be vaccinated against Covid-19 this week.

Cardinal Dew said the bishops took their advice about vaccines from reputable doctors, scientists and the bishops' own bioethics agency, the Nathaniel Centre.

"We reject the false information circulating on the internet and elsewhere that claims vaccines should not be used," Cardinal Dew said. "Vaccines work, and they protect against a wide range of illnesses. Because of vaccines, once-universal diseases such as smallpox have been wiped out, saving countless lives.

"To protect everyone against a disease, it is vital that most people in a country be vaccinated. The 2019-20 New Zealand measles epidemic happened because only about 80 per cent of the population were vaccinated. As a result, the disease was carried from Auckland to Samoa where more than 80 people died, most of them babies and children.

"Everyone, including Catholics, has a moral responsibility to protect themselves and others by getting a Covid-19 vaccine as soon as they become eligible for it under the Government's planned vaccine programme," said Cardinal Dew.

The Vatican doctrinal office statement endorsed by the Pope said that all vaccinations recognised as clinically safe and effective could "be used in good conscience with the certain knowledge that the use of such vaccines does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion from which the cells used in production of the vaccines derive."

- A list of links for further information is attached

Links for further information:

- Pope Francis saying people have a moral obligation to be vaccinated:
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-francis-suggests-people-have-moral-obligation-take-coronavirus-vaccine>
- The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith December 21 note saying it is morally acceptable to use Covid-19 vaccines derived from fetus cell lines:
<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-12/vatican-cdf-note-covid-vaccine-morality-abortion.html>
- Pope Francis endorses CDF note: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/vaticans-doctrinal-office-coronavirus-vaccines-morally-acceptable-catholics>
- *Nathaniel Report* (publication of the NZ Bishops' Nathanael Centre) article on the ethics of vaccines derived from fetus cell lines:
<https://www.catholic.org.nz/assets/Uploads/COVID-19-Vaccine-Issue-61-Nathaniel-Report.pdf>
- *NZ Catholic* article by Nathaniel Centre director John Kleinsman report on the ethics of Covid-19 vaccines: <https://nzcatholic.org.nz/2020/05/27/the-ethical-derivation-of-vaccines-for-covid-19/>
- *NZ Catholic* article discussing Covid-19 vaccines:
<https://nzcatholic.org.nz/2020/12/10/new-vaccines-prompt-some-serious-questions/>