



COLORADO CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

1535 Logan Street | Denver, CO 80203-1913

303-894-8808 | cocatholicconference.org

August 5, 2021

A Letter from the Bishops of Colorado on COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates

We, the Catholic bishops of Colorado, consistent with our previous letters on COVID-19 vaccines, affirm that the use of some COVID-19 vaccines is morally acceptable under certain circumstances. Throughout the pandemic we have cooperated with the various secular authorities and encouraged Catholics to help each other, and the broader society, remain healthy and safe during this challenging time. We understand that some individuals have well-founded convictions that lead them to discern they should not get vaccinated. We are pleased to see that in the case of the most recent Denver vaccine mandate there is accommodation for sincerely held religious beliefs. This is appropriate under the laws protecting freedom of religion.

We always remain vigilant when any bureaucracy seeks to impose uniform and sweeping requirements on a group of people in areas of personal conscience. Throughout history, human rights violations and a loss of respect for each person's God-given dignity often begin with government mandates that fail to respect the freedom of conscience. In the case of the COVID-19 vaccine, we are convicted that the government should not impose medical interventions on an individual or group of persons. We urge respect for each person's convictions and personal choices.

We have been asked several questions by the Faithful about relevant Catholic teaching applicable to this issue. The Catholic Church teaches that a person may refuse a medical intervention, including a vaccination, if his or her conscience leads them to that decision. Here are relevant points for this personal decision:

- Vaccination is not morally obligatory and so must be voluntary.
- There is a moral duty to refuse the use of medical products, including certain vaccines, that are created using human cells lines derived from abortion; however, it is permissible to use such vaccines only under case-specific conditions—if there are no other alternatives available and the intent is to preserve life.
- A person's assessment of whether the benefits of a medical intervention outweigh the undesirable side-effects are to be respected unless they contradict authoritative Catholic moral teachings.
- A person is morally required to obey his or her conscience.
- For more information on these weighty ethical issues, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has issued a statement that can be read here: [Answers to Key Ethical Questions About COVID-19 Vaccines \(PDF\)](#)

Taken as a whole, these points mean a Catholic may judge it right or wrong to receive certain vaccines for a variety of reasons, and there is no Church law or rule that obligates a Catholic to receive a vaccine—including COVID-19 vaccines.

The three Colorado Catholic dioceses remain committed to working with public health and other secular authorities to protect the wellbeing of our communities, at the same time urging that personal freedoms

of conscience and expression be fully supported, and the integrity and autonomy of religious institutions be respected. The vaccination question is a deeply personal issue, and we continue to support religious exemptions from any and all vaccine mandates.

If any person comes to an informed judgment that he or she should receive or not receive a vaccine, that person should follow their conscience, and they should not be penalized for doing so. We encourage any individual seeking exemption to consult their employer or school. The Colorado Catholic Conference also has a letter available to be signed by pastors of the Faithful if a Catholic wants a written record that they are seeking exemption on religious grounds.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila
Archbishop of Denver

Most Reverend Stephen J. Berg
Bishop of Pueblo

Most Reverend James R. Golka
Bishop of Colorado Springs

Most Reverend Jorge Rodriguez
Auxiliary Bishop of Denver