

Covid-19 Vaccination Religious Exemption FAQs

1. “What is required for a religious exemption to vaccination?”

- a. If you are part of a specific religious/faith group that prohibits vaccination, please tell us who that group is and information about your involvement. Please note that there are almost no religions or denominations that prohibit vaccination. Almost all of them encourage vaccination out of love for others.
- b. If you are not part of such a religious/faith group, please explain fully the reason for your personal religious objection and show us how it is religious or spiritual in nature (i.e. involving ultimate questions and ideas about life, meaning, and death) and aligned with a comprehensive system of beliefs about fundamental or ultimate matters. Then explain how this belief system is a sincerely held one that impacts your life holistically beyond just the issue of vaccination.

2. “Why do I have to apply for a religious exemption again if I filled one out the last time vaccination was required?”

- a. Vaccination exemptions must be requested each time vaccines are offered and required. There is no plan to carry exemptions into the future.

3. “Doesn’t my religion teach that getting the vaccine is wrong?”

- a. Actually, most major world religions teach just the opposite. Almost all religions teach that because vaccines have been proven to protect against illness and have stopped pandemics in the past, religious support and encouragement of vaccination is born out of love and concern for others. Please see: <https://www.vumc.org/health-wellness/news-resource-articles/immunizations-and-religion> and <https://www.maineaap.org/assets/docs/Religious-Views-of-Vaccination-At-a-Glance.pdf>.

4. “What if I am Jewish or Muslim and cannot take a vaccine that is made with pork products?”

- a. The Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines do not include pork products. Please see <https://www.nebraskamed.com/COVID/you-asked-we-answered-are-covid-19-vaccine-ingredients-public> and <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/clinical-considerations/covid-19-vaccines-us.html#Appendix-C>.

5. “What if I’m Jehovah’s Witness and my church forbids vaccination?”

- a. Since 1952, the Watchtower Society has allowed vaccinations and in 2008 officially endorsed receiving them. Watchtower Society encourages each individual witness to follow their own conscience. <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/fag/jw-vaccines-immunization/>.

6. “What if I believe that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and it is wrong to put anything impure in it?”

- a. The standard of a sincerely held religious belief may not necessarily be met by this statement when applied specifically to vaccinations. Vaccines are no less pure than other commonly used medications and are subject to extensive quality-control procedures by manufacturers and regulators. The claim that vaccination would defile the body (as opposed to taking common medications like aspirin or prescribed medications for specific health conditions) may pose a medical objection rather than a religious objection. In addition, the Biblical context of the often quoted 1 Corinthians 6:19 addresses sexual impurity, not taking medications or vaccines whether orally or as an injection.

7. “Can’t I just quote a Bible verse to exempt me from vaccination?”

- a. A religious exemption requires a person to possess a sincerely held religious/spiritual belief system that would be violated by taking a vaccine. To obtain such an exemption, the person must explain how their

belief system is religious in nature (i.e. involves ultimate questions and ideas about life, purpose, and death) and how it is sincerely held. Simply quoting a Bible verse or passage from a sacred book may not be enough to demonstrate this.

8. “What if I’m pro-life, aren’t Covid vaccines made from aborted fetal tissue?”

- a. Actually, they are not. No fetal cells are present in the final vaccine formulations.
- b. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines do not require the use of any fetal cell cultures in order to produce the vaccine and have been found ethically uncontroversial by such pro-life groups as the Charlotte Lozier Institute and the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities.
- c. Some vaccines, such as the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, use decades old fetal cell lines in production. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine utilizes the PER.C6 fetal cell line, which is derived from a fetus electively aborted in 1985. However, because the abortions were not performed in order to create vaccines, future abortions are not encouraged through their use, and these cells are not present in the vaccines. Most religious groups such as the Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission have determined the use of the vaccine to be morally acceptable.
- d. For more information, please see:
 - i. https://www.health.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/COVID%20Vaccine%20Page/COVID-19_Vaccine_Fetal_Cell_Handout.pdf.
 - ii. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/COVID-19_Vaccines_and_Fetal_Cells_031921_720415_7.pdf.
 - iii. <https://www.nebraskamed.com/COVID/you-asked-we-answered-do-the-covid-19-vaccines-contain-aborted-fetal-cells>.
- e. Please note that religious authorities, such as the Pope, have not only pronounced taking such vaccines to be morally acceptable, but have suggested people have a moral obligation to receive the vaccine. Please see: <https://eppc.org/news/statement-from-pro-life-catholic-scholars-on-the-moral-acceptability-of-receiving-covid-19-vaccines/> and <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-francis-suggests-people-have-moral-obligation-take-coronavirus-vaccine>.

9. “Do I have to get a religious leader/scholar to confirm my religious/spiritual faith and my objection to being vaccinated?”

- a. While you are not required to do so, it may be helpful in making a determination.

10. “What if I believe God will simply heal me of any sickness?”

- a. While certain faith groups reject all medical treatment and medications out of such a belief, the majority teach that God can heal both through prayer and through medical interventions. To qualify for a religious exemption, this belief would need to be something more than an isolated, single-faceted belief or worship. For example, rejecting vaccination while utilizing other pain killers for headaches, antacids for heartburn, and antibiotics for infections would likely demonstrate that the objection is for a reason other than religion.

11. “Is there an argument for taking a vaccine for religious reasons?”

- a. Yes, most religions argue that taking a vaccine is recommended for the welfare of the community as a whole. For example, within Christianity many teach the themes of loving your neighbor as yourself (James 2:8) and sacrificing for the love of others (Luke 10:33-35; John 13:34-35) as reason to support vaccinations.

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- b. In the Jewish faith, taking precautions to protect health is a mitzvah (<https://forward.com/news/473643/jews-accept-covid-vaccine-religious-groups-survey/>).
- c. The teachings of Islam emphasize the preservation of life (<https://aboutislam.net/shariah/shariah-and-humanity/shariah-and-life/preservation-of-life-in-islam-theory-and-practice/>).
- d. Buddhism emphasizes treating life kindly and saving life (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5141457/>).

12. "I have a political or philosophical objection to getting vaccinated, so will that qualify?"

- a. Social, political, or economic philosophies do not qualify for a religious exemption.

13. "What if I just believe that I should be free to make my own choice about getting vaccinated?"

- a. Personal freedom is a cherished value for many people, but it does not apply to a religious exemption. Also, in most faith systems, one's responsibility to take care of others is emphasized even over personal freedom.

14. "I simply do not want to take the vaccine. Can I use a religious exemption to avoid vaccination?"

- a. Personal preference is not grounds to refuse vaccination based on religion.

15. Could you provide a list of religions that approve of or prohibit vaccination?

- a. Yes, the following religions/denominations allow and even encourage vaccination:
 - i. Amish
 - ii. Anglican
 - iii. Baptist
 - iv. Buddhism
 - v. Congregational
 - vi. Eastern Orthodox
 - vii. Episcopalian
 - viii. Hinduism
 - ix. Islam
 - x. Jainism
 - xi. Jehovah's Witness
 - xii. Judaism
 - xiii. LDS (Latter Day Saints)
 - xiv. Lutheran
 - xv. Mennonite
 - xvi. Oriental Orthodox
 - xvii. Pentecostal
 - xviii. Presbyterian
 - xix. Roman Catholicism
 - xx. Scientology
 - xxi. Seventh Day Adventist
 - xxii. Unitarian-Universalist
 - xxiii. Hmong
- b. The following religions/denominations have some theological objection to vaccination:
 - i. Church of Christ, Scientist
 - ii. Dutch Reformed
 - iii. Certain faith-healing denominations, such as
 - 1. Faith Tabernacle
 - 2. Church of the First Born
 - 3. Faith Assembly
 - 4. End Times Ministries
 - 5. First Century Gospel Church

16. "Are there more resources I can read regarding these issues?"

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a. Yes, in addition to the links above, here are some other helpful resources:

- i. <https://www.prinz-lawfirm.com/our-blog/2020/december/the-covid-19-vaccine-is-here-a-look-at-religious/>
- ii. <https://www.venable.com/insights/publications/2021/06/employers-guide-to-the-religious-exemption>
- iii. <https://www.historyofvaccines.org/content/articles/cultural-perspectives-vaccination>