

## **Religious Exemption Advice**

1. Most employers seem to be requiring a written statement explaining your “religious” reason/s for seeking the exemption from vaccination. You will likely be contacted by your employer afterwards to have a discussion about your written request, so be spiritually prepared to verbally articulate your position in addition to your written explanation. One believer who has already undergone the process said he was told by his HR department to plan for a 45-minute face-to-face meeting, but it actually took only 20 minutes.
2. You will likely be pressed on whether your reason for seeking an exemption is truly religiously based or whether your real objection is medical/health concerns about the vaccines just masquerading behind a “religious” exemption. So, as a matter of honesty and integrity before God, even though you may also have strong medical objections, you must be sure that you truly do have a legitimate “religious” basis for not getting vaccinated. You will likely be pressed on this distinction, so be prepared to focus on just your religious reasons.
3. You may be asked where you attend church, whether your convictions are the official position or teaching of the church, and how long you personally have held your religious convictions. Feel free to state that you consider yourself a member of Duluth Bible Church but understand that the church does not have a position on the vaccines but regards them as a matter of personal liberty of individual conscience, though we do believe abortion is murder and therefore sin. If you would like, I can write for you a pastoral letter of support on church letterhead stating that I affirm you’re part of DBC and as a matter of conscience you have biblical/religious grounds for your appeal.
4. Consider using this as an opportunity to share the gospel in writing and verbally. This may also demonstrate to your employer the sincerity of your beliefs and claims of conscientious objection.
5. Use Bible verses to support your views and explain in your own words how these verses apply to your rejection of the vaccines. Some verses to consider that others have used for their religious exemptions are listed below. These verses may not all pertain to your situation or conscience, and thus are limited in scope. They pertain only to doing what our conscience permits before God once a person knows that elective abortions played a role with each of the vaccines available in America and that essentially evil/sinful ends do not justify the means, and that we must always do what our conscience tells us, otherwise we are sinning against God.

Romans 14, esp. vv. 22-23 (cf. James 1:6)

1 Corinthians 10:23-31 (note the conscience of one believer vs another; both are valid before God)

Colossians 3:23

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Romans 12:9; 13:10

Ephesians 5:11

Exodus 21:22-25

Psalms 91:1-7; 139:13-16

Isaiah 44:24

Jeremiah 1:5

Luke 1:41, 44; 2:6-7

2 Chronicles 16:12

6. If you mention the use of aborted fetal tissue or cell lines as one of your reasons for rejecting vaccination, be aware of the differences between vaccines in terms of how aborted fetal tissue was used for each. These differences are highlighted below in red. Be ready to give an informed, nuanced answer regarding how each of the 3 vaccines currently available in the US (J&J, Moderna, Pfizer) have used aborted fetuses. You may wish to include in your letter the aborted fetal cell #s HEK-293 and PER.c6. I would also recommend using the wording in red below and avoid saying that aborted fetal tissue is in the vaccines themselves since the issue seems to be more of an ethical, moral problem of using vaccines that originated from aborted babies for their research, development, testing, and sometimes production. The sacrifice of any child for the purposes of scientific progress is never justified. The summaries below are adapted from the following sources: “The Catholic Answer to Vaccines” 3 August 2021 <https://mycatholicdoctor.com/our-services/vaccines/> and “Covid-19 Treatments and Vaccines in Development” 12 January 2021 <https://cogforlife.org/wp-content/uploads/CovidCompareMoralImmoral.pdf>

1. **Pfizer:** Pfizer/BioNTech’s coronavirus/COVID vaccine known as BNT162b2 was developed using genetic sequencing on computers *without using fetal cells*. The [HEK-293 abortion-related cell line](#) was used in **research** related to this vaccine, but **not the testing** of the vaccine. This cell line originated from kidney cells from a fetus that was aborted in 1973. No cell line, fetal or otherwise, is required for the ongoing production of this vaccine. This vaccine is currently in use and requires two doses.
2. **Moderna:** Moderna’s mRNA-1273 vaccine *does not* require aborted fetal cell lines for production, [but aborted fetal cell lines were used in both the development and testing of this vaccine](#). This vaccine is currently in use and is easier to distribute than Pfizer due to cooling requirements. It also requires two doses.
3. **Johnson & Johnson:** [The J&J/Janssen COVID-19 vaccine, JNJ-78436735 does use the abortion-related PER.c6 cell line for ongoing production](#). This cell line was also used in the **development** and **testing** of the vaccine. PER.c6 is a proprietary cell line owned by Janssen, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson, developed from retinal cells from an 18-week-old fetus aborted in 1985. This vaccine is currently in use. This is a single-dose vaccine, unlike other COVID vaccines which require 2 doses.
4. **AstraZenica:** The AstraZenica/University of Oxford vaccine AZD1222 **does use the HEK-293 cell line for production**. This cell line was also used in both **development** and **testing** of the vaccine. The AstraZenica vaccine is not approved in the United States.
5. **Sanofi/GlaxoSmithKline:** The Sanofi/GSK vaccine *is not* associated with aborted fetal cell lines for production. GSK produces this vaccine using a modified virus cultivated on insect cells. [The HEK-293 cell line was used in the confirmatory testing of the vaccine](#). It is unclear if and when this vaccine may become available to the American public, it is currently in phase 3 trials. The Sanofi company is also developing a different COVID vaccine that did use the [HEK-293 abortion-related cell line](#) in the **research** phase.
6. **Novavax:** Novavax expects Emergency Use Authorization to occur in the fourth quarter of 2021 for its NVX-CoV2373 matrix, which is yet to be approved due to analytical work delays. Novavax was one of the forerunners of the COVID-19 vaccine pioneers, attempting to bring its prefusion protein-based vaccine, made using Novavax’ proprietary nanoparticle technology and Matrix-M adjuvant, to market with help from \$1.6 billion of US government assistance through the “Operation Warp Speed” program. Some believers who have declined the J&J, Moderna, and Pfizer vaccines have considered the Novavax vaccine as an option, but you should know that it was also **tested on HEK-293 aborted fetal cells** like the GlaxoSmithKline vaccine.

7. You should also be informed about other common vaccines that have used aborted babies in some way, whether development, testing, research, or production. See the separate charts from Children of God for Life and the article from Liberty Counsel “Compulsory Vaccinations Threaten Religious Freedom.” Be prepared to explain a potential inconsistency, namely, why you may have received some or all of these other common vaccines in the past but you are now rejecting the current COVID-19 vaccines for “religious” reasons. You may need to use the operative word “knowingly” in your explanation, i.e., that you would not have knowingly taken vaccines derived from abortion for their development, testing, research, or production, but now that you know this it would be a violation of your conscience (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 10:23-31; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9). If this pertains to you, then you may also want to consider James 4:17: “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

8. Most states in the US have statutes allowing for exemptions from vaccination due to religious conviction. See [www.ncsl.org/research/health/school-immunization-exemption-state-laws.aspx](http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/school-immunization-exemption-state-laws.aspx)

Minnesota currently recognizes philosophical disagreement as a legal basis for refusing vaccination (121A.15, “Health Standards; Immunizations; School Children.”). The MN statute does not explicitly recognize “religion” as a reason for claiming an exemption, however, as a practical matter, the non-medical/philosophical exemption encompasses religious belief as a valid basis of exemption. Religious belief may also be a strong legal reason for seeking an exemption since it may be considered a constitutional “free exercise of religion” (1st Amendment) issue. It is unknown to me the effect that FDA approval in the near future may have on a US citizen’s constitutional rights. Currently (Aug. 14, 2021), Covid vaccines have only been given Emergency Use Authorization, not FDA approval. It is generally assumed that once FDA approval is granted, both the private and public sector will have greater legal authority to some extent to mandate vaccination. I would recommend trying to get a religious exemption from your employer soon, before FDA approval, which could be just weeks away. If granted before FDA approval, it will be harder for your employer to revoke that status from you after they’ve conceded you had religious grounds, and thus 1st amendment constitutional grounds, in the first place. That’s just my opinion and I could be wrong. Some people have also mentioned Title VII of the Civil Rights Act that employers must follow, which mentions that reasonable accommodations must be made by employers for their employees’ religious beliefs and practices. You may want to read through it on the EEOC’s website and be informed and prepared regarding this legal right:

<https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/title-vii-civil-rights-act-1964>

There is legal precedent in the 1905 Jacobson vs. Massachusetts US Supreme Court ruling to allow states to mandate that their citizens be vaccinated. It seems many legal scholars believe it can’t be used to mandate vaccinations of the entire population today. In fact, after the ruling, Jacobson paid the original \$5 fine rather than he and his son getting revaccinated for smallpox, and the State of Massachusetts never did follow through with compulsory vaccination. For more on this US Supreme Court decision, I would recommend this site: <https://www.nvic.org/NVIC-Vaccine-News/November-2016/forced-vaccination-the-tragic-legacy.aspx#comments>

9. As a personal, pastoral note, let me also just add that we are not promised consistent justice and righteousness in this world before Christ returns. In fact, He promised that we will face opposition from the world (John 15:18-21; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 10:34-35; 1 Peter 2:19-21; 3:14-17), and you must be ready to accept the consequences of your decision and stand by faith, which may include losing your job. But if you’ve conducted yourself by faith through this process, you will gain an eternal, heavenly reward from the Lord at His coming, which may be very soon! “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7).