

Understanding Fetal Cell Use in Vaccines



Do vaccines contain fetal cells or parts of fetuses?

No, vaccines do not contain fetal cells or original fetal tissue. The final vaccine your child receives does not contain fetal cells, fetal tissue or parts of a fetus.

Why are fetal cells mentioned in vaccine discussions?

During the vaccine manufacturing process, fetal cells are used to grow viruses, but the viruses themselves are then separated and purified to remove all cell material from the vaccine.

What role do fetal cells play in vaccine development?

To make a vaccine, scientists first need to replicate the virus or bacteria that's causing the disease. Living cells, especially human cells, are ideal places to replicate a virus or bacteria because that is where they naturally grow best. To do this safely, scientists needed clean, reliable human cells. In the 1960s, scientists used fetal cells to develop new vaccines. Fetal cells were chosen because they came from the sterile environment of the womb, meaning they did not contain any other viruses or contaminants.

How are those cells still used today?

The cells developed in the 1960s are cell lines, meaning they have been safely and ethically maintained in laboratories for many decades. Scientists can freeze, store and regrow these same cells as needed. No additional fetal tissue is required.

What vaccines were developed from fetal cell lines?

The vaccines developed using these cell lines include:

- Rubella (part of the MMR vaccine)
- Varicella (chickenpox)
- Hepatitis A
- Rabies

What if I have moral concerns?

There is no alternative vaccine for rubella, varicella or hepatitis A. However, an alternate option for rabies vaccines is available.

Major religious leaders and bio ethics groups have reviewed this issue and consider vaccination morally acceptable. They note that:

- The cells used today are very far removed from their original source
- Protecting children from potentially life-threatening diseases outweighs moral or religious concerns related to the origin of the cells.

Texas Children's Hospital is dedicated to providing every child and woman with the highest-quality medical care — rooted in compassion, respect, and the belief that every family deserves to feel heard and supported.

If you have additional questions about the use of fetal cells in vaccines, please discuss them with your child's pediatrician. Our care teams are committed to respectful, open conversations with families.