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*Community support
and healing resources*

AWA Newsletter

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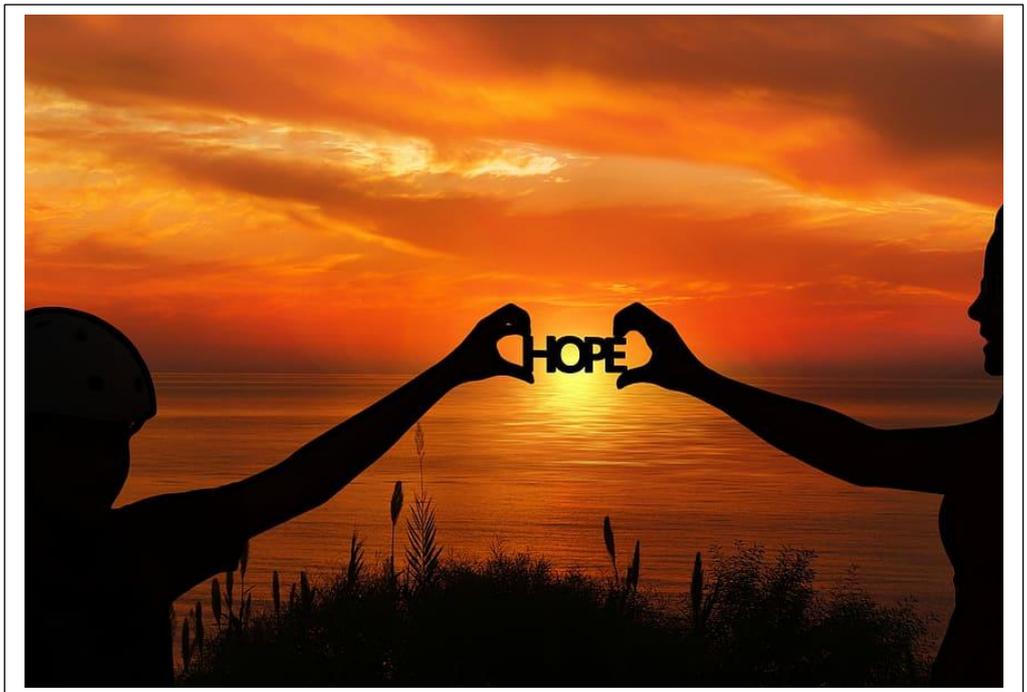
Information and resources in one place, from the Antiochian Welfare Association (AWA).

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MONTHLY EDITORIAL

Welcome to the latest edition of our Newsletter.



COVID VACCINE: PATRIARCHAL STATEMENT

Statement of the Antiochian Orthodox Patriarchate on COVID-19 Vaccines

Damascus, Syria | February 8th, 2021



Considering the spread of Covid-19 pandemic which afflicts the world and its people today, and subsequent to the production of its vaccines, the Antiochian Orthodox Church, after consultation between His Beatitude and the Antiochian Hierarchs, would like to clarify the following to her faithful:

1. In the Pastoral Letter issued in 2019, the Church reaffirmed “the sanctity of life and the necessity of respecting it alongside her openness to scientific advancement.” In the same context and believing in the pivotal role played by scientific progress throughout the ages, the Church encourages scientific research and scientists, and blesses every proper initiative that contributes to the progress of humanity and relieves human suffering. Therefore, she offers her prayers for all those working to safeguard and serve human life, including researchers, scientists, medical doctors, nurses, and all healthcare workers in hospitals. She pleads for their protection, especially that, in this pandemic, they have showed unique dedication, continuous vigilance, and heroic self-sacrifice. May God strengthen them with His grace. May they be faithful co-workers with Christ our God, the Physician of our souls and bodies. The Church also offers her prayers for the healing of all the sick, the sustenance of their families, the comfort of the bereaved, and the repose of the souls of those who have departed in hope of resurrection and eternal life.

2. After scientists have prepared a set of Covid-19 vaccines and in reviewing various medical reports and consulting with specialists, the Church considers that the matter of vaccination is not the specialty of the field of theological and spiritual studies, but rather specific to the field of medical sciences and its authorities. The decision regarding taking the vaccine is a personal decision. Every faithful has the right to make this decision in consultation with his or her doctor.
3. This pandemic continues to pose a threat to human life, since the health specialists have not yet found a cure for it despite the immunity that the vaccine provides, which we hope is effective. Thus, the Church draws the attention of her faithful to the importance of continuing to adhere to all health measures requested by the competent authorities, whether before or after vaccination, in order to further preserve the safety of society and human life. Moreover, we note that the present vaccines were made in record time with the aim of limiting the spread of the pandemic, thanks to the contemporary medical and technological progress, the concerted scientific efforts, and the procurement of necessary resources.
4. The Church warns against any political or commercial exploitation of the issue of vaccines, especially against withholding them from marginalized groups and distributing them in a way that contradicts the principles of equality, justice, and solidarity among all people.
5. The Church understands that there are different existing opinions stemming from fears and concerns that are being circulated in the media in an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and intimidation. This atmosphere is caused by the way the issue of public health has been tackled and the many pressures that were and are still being practiced. Some have set out to address this issue based on their desire to preserve the gift of life, but without neglecting their faith and spiritual background. The Church confirms that all these people, regardless of their different opinions and various positions, remain her children. She invites them to preserve the bond of peace, unity, and love that brings us together in Christ.
6. There is no doubt that all preventive health measures and vaccinations are beneficial to our physical safety. However, we must not overlook the importance of our spiritual safety, which requires us to turn to that “safe distancing” that we, as humans, practice between us and God, our fellow human beings, and our natural environment. We live in estrangement from God, in a conflict with our brother, and in an incursion into our vital environment through an insatiable consumption of its resources. This situation is dealt with by changing our behavior through sincere repentance, returning to God in prayer and a life of communion and service. We must renounce whatever harms ourselves, our brother, and our environment. We are called to live the mystery of Divine Thanksgiving, being grateful for God's gifts and mercies, and igniting our hope through reading the Holy Scriptures, the lives of the saints and their teachings. The permanent fellowship with God and all his saints incites the church militant to join the church triumphant, so the latter pours upon the former Divine graces of sincere love, courageous spirit, and genuine solidarity with our fellow human beings.

7. Finally, the joy springing from our belief that Christ is with us until the end of time makes us companions on the way with our Fathers who followed the path of struggle in every time and place. This joy strengthens us in the face of every evil and iniquity, and makes us like them, able to overcome, with God's grace and through concerted efforts, the challenges that face our journey, so that God may be glorified in our words and deeds.

A SPECIALIST DOCTOR ANSWERS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: COVID & VACCINES

Some of your COVID-19 and vaccine questions answered...

Written by Dr. Samar Ojaimi | August 2021 | Melbourne, Australia



To help our parishes make an informed decision about the COVID-19 vaccine, the sections below address some common questions about the virus and vaccines. May Our Lord and Saviour enlighten us as we remember, according to the Wisdom of Sirach, "God's works are never finished, and from Him health is upon the face of the earth".

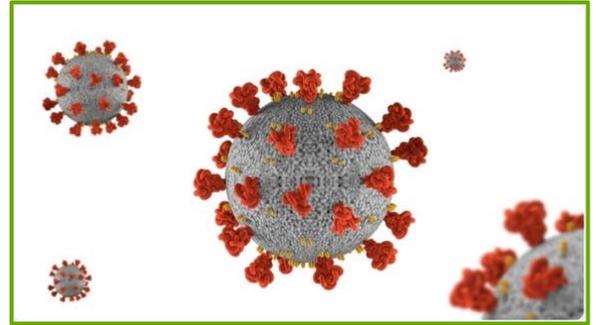
What is COVID-19, and isn't it the same as the flu?

COVID-19 belongs to a family of viruses called coronaviruses. The 'flu' is caused by the influenza virus. Both are respiratory viruses, which means they get into the body through our airway, causing symptoms such as runny nose, cough and sore throat. Our immune system fights the viruses to get rid of them and causes us to feel sick with fever, muscle aches and pains, headaches and sometimes upset tummies. With the flu, most people recover, though some can get bad lung disease, bacterial infections and die. With COVID-19, some people's immune system kicks into overdrive and causes much more inflammation than what is required, causing lung, kidney and heart failure. The inflammation that COVID-19 causes can also lead to clots in the brain and heart attacks. Sadly, the inflammation can become so overwhelming that death can occur. So, compared to the Flu, COVID-19 behaves differently, is deadlier and is also more easily transmitted. COVID-19 is also causing a 'Pandemic' because it is a new virus spreading around the world, and our immune system has no memory or prior knowledge of it.

Both viruses spread through droplets and the air and therefore can be stopped by precautions such as wearing masks, keeping distance from others and hand sanitising.

Isn't COVID-19 treatable?

In many, COVID-19 gets better on its own. Some need admissions to hospital for oxygen because their lungs are full of infection and cannot oxygenate well. Some people need breathing tubes. In some, their lungs get so full of infection, they need to be



bypassed so that machines can oxygenate their blood until they recover. Sometimes, kidneys fail and need dialysis. To treat inflammation caused by COVID-19, we use strong anti-inflammatory medications that stop inflammation signals and protect the organs from more damage. Because of the risk of blood clots with COVID, we use blood thinners to prevent them. There are also medicines that target the virus directly, called antivirals and antibodies, which may help clear the virus from the body. Lots of other medicines have been investigated including vitamins and older medications, such as an antimalarial called hydroxychloroquine and a worm medication called ivermectin. However, many of these have been shown to either not work or haven't been used on enough people to know if they do work.

Unfortunately, while these medicines help, they don't always work. In Australia, 2.3% of people who get COVID-19 die (~2 in 100 people). The best way to avoid dying from COVID-19 is to avoid getting COVID by following restrictions or get vaccinated against it.

What do the different COVID-19 virus strains mean?

Viruses use our own cells to multiply and continue to spread. In doing so, their genes alter slightly and consequently changes their behaviour. For COVID-19, the virus morphed into different strains, which we call by the Greek Alphabet with the Alpha strain being the original strain from Wuhan, China. The delta strain began in India and is the main strain now circulating.

Unfortunately, the changes in the Delta strain have made it spread more quickly and cause more severe disease. Despite this, while vaccine effectiveness differs between strains, the vaccines still work against the Delta strain preventing severe COVID-19 disease.

What are vaccines and how do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

After our immune system fights an infection, it develops memory so that next time we are faced with the exact same virus, we quickly make antibodies that stop us getting sick. Vaccines use this ability to protect us against viruses we haven't seen before. For example, with the COVID-19 vaccine, we develop antibodies to a bit of the virus called the spike protein, so that if we catch the virus, we can fight it without getting the bad inflammation.

Vaccines come in different forms. For COVID-19, in Australia, we have different vaccines currently available:

1. **Vaxzevria**, made by the company **AstraZeneca**, is a vaccine which uses the body of a harmless virus to get into our immune cells, which then start making the spike protein. Because the spike protein is foreign to our body, our immune system interprets as a new infection, clears it and in the process makes antibodies and develops memory.
2. **Comirnaty**, made by **Pfizer-BioNTech**, and Spikevax, by Moderna, both use a lipid (fat) sphere to carry that the spike protein message (called mRNA).
3. **Covavax**, by **Novavax**, is coming later in the year. This vaccine has the actual spike protein inside it, which stimulates the immune response.

None of the vaccines have the equipment to enter and alter our genes, or to cause COVID-19 illness. Our body completely clears all the components of the vaccines within a few days.

What is inside the COVID-19 vaccine? I'm told there is a chip that can track me.

Vaccines are composed of mostly water, with the active ingredient being the message that makes the spike protein. In some vaccines, like the Novavax vaccine, there are components which help boost the immune response, called adjuvants. Otherwise, there are also stabilisers that vary according to the vaccine, made up of various sugars that are naturally found in nature, and all in very small amounts. The mRNA vaccines, including Pfizer, have lipids that make up the sphere that carries the message.

Some people have concerns about a hidden chip. This is not possible for several reasons. The amount of vaccine injected is clear and very small (0.3-0.5mls) and could not hide a functional chip. Even if a microscopic chip is present, our immune system, attacks it like it does viruses and expels it. Have you ever noticed what happens when you get a splinter in your finger?

I'm worried that the vaccine was rushed, and corners were cut in making it.

Over the years, vaccines have saved many lives. They are routinely given to children around the world and are very safe. Normally, it takes many years to make a vaccine. The vaccine is first tested in the laboratory, and then in a small number of volunteers. Once the right dose is found, it is tested on a larger number of people to see its effect. If it works, it is then tested in many more people to confirm and to assess for side effects. Side effects, otherwise, also known as adverse events, mean a reaction to a medicine or vaccine and can vary from mild such as sore arm to more serious side effects. Once this process is completed, companies start making it in bulk. Trials take money and time, as volunteers are hard to find if infections are not common.

When it came to making COVID-19 vaccines, the science behind the vaccines wasn't new, because they were being investigated for other coronaviruses. Given the pandemic, there was also a very large number of infections, making it much quicker to get volunteers to test the vaccine and move through all the right steps quickly. Because of the urgency to stop people dying, a lot of money was also put into the trials. Also, the companies that make the vaccines invested significantly, and started production even before being certain the vaccines work – a risk that paid off. No corners were cut in making the vaccines. In fact, they were approved by the medical authorities (TGA) who ensure they are safe, before being released for use in the public.

Are the vaccines safe? I've heard that they cause allergies, clots and heart issues?

So far, more than 4.9 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been given to people around the world. In Australia, by 15 August 2021, 15.3 million doses have been given. The TGA continually monitors the vaccines and reports on side effects. So far, the vaccines are shown to be very safe and effective, including in children older than 12 years and pregnant women. The most common side effects include a sore arm, headache, muscle pain, fever and chills. These effects are mostly expected and caused by our immune response to the vaccine.

Allergies can be common, especially to things we eat such as egg, nuts, and medications such as penicillins. However, allergy to the vaccines is uncommon. Serious allergy, called anaphylaxis, is very rare, and is also very treatable. Vaccines are given in specialised centres that can manage allergies. In some people, because of the immune response, they can develop hives (urticaria) after the vaccine. This does not necessarily mean you shouldn't have your other doses of vaccine.

Blood clots can very rarely occur with the AstraZeneca vaccine. They occur after the immune system accidentally makes antibodies that attack platelets, which are things that help us clot when we injure ourselves. So far in Australia we have had 112 cases of this rare side-effect, out of 8.1 million doses. Because we know how to treat it, death from the clots is extremely rare, even rarer than dying from getting hit by a car. Also, it is important to remember that COVID itself causes clots. If you experience a bad headache, tummy pain, shortness of breath within the first 3 weeks of getting your vaccine, it is important you seek medical care early.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine can rarely cause inflammation of the lining of the heart and heart muscle, more commonly in young men. However, this tends to settle on its own after a few days.

It is important to understand that all medicines and vaccines come with some risk, even a simple Paracetamol. However, the risks of the vaccine are much less than the risk of COVID-19.

But does the vaccine work? I've heard that people are still getting COVID.

How well a vaccine works depends on how well it prevents someone from getting the virus, how well it prevents us from passing the virus to others, OR how well it prevents bad sickness and death. The COVID-19 vaccines may not be as good at preventing infection or spread, but they are all excellent at preventing death. Around the world, almost everyone dying is unvaccinated.

Getting the vaccine, even if you've had COVID-19 previously, will keep you and your family safe from bad COVID-19 and ensure we return to normal life. No doubt you have many more questions. Please make time to speak to your GP to discuss them and clarify any questions.

From a medical perspective, the fact that we have these vaccines available to us is nothing short of a miracle. It is God's inspiration that allowed these vaccines to become available and have already saved many lives. By getting vaccinated, not only will you protect yourself, but also those around you who have a weak immune system and can't respond as well. It becomes a case of "love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt 22:39). The sooner we get vaccinated, the sooner we can start living with the virus, like we currently do with the Flu virus.

May Our Lord guide you in making your decision. May we be reminded that: "Healing comes from the Most High", for "He gave skill to men that He might be glorified in His wonders" (Wisdom of Sirach 38:1-6).

Dr. Samar Ojaimi MBBS (hons) FRACP FRCPA PhD is a member of St. Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church, Melbourne; is a Theology student, and a doctor working for Monash Health in Infection Infectious Diseases, Immunology, and Immunopathology.

Do COVID-19 VACCINES CAUSE INFERTILITY?

Is it true?

The Federal Health Department has provided the following answer:

"The TGA will not approve a vaccine for use in Australia unless it is safe and effective. This includes impacts on fertility. None of the COVID-19 vaccines currently approved, or under review by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) cause sterilisation/infertility. Find out more below."

To read more, visit the Department of Health or [CLICK HERE](#).

NEED HELP WITH OTHER BILLS AND EXPENSES?

Sydney Water

Sydney Water offers many services to help with your bills, such as:

- Extend your due date
- Set up a payment plan
- Set up Centrepay payments
- Request essential plumbing work
- Apply for a pensioner rebate
- Call us for confidential advice
- 36226Scheme (PAS) credits
- Difficulties due to family violence

You can call the Sydney Water Customer Care team between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday, on 1800 222 280 or visit at any time:

sydneywater.com.au/helpwithyourbill

No Interest Loan Scheme

The No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) offers individuals and families on low incomes access to safe, fair and affordable loans.

Loan amounts are up to \$1,500 for household goods and services. Loans are not for cash. Repayments are set up at an affordable amount over 12 – 18 months.

Are you eligible? Find your nearest provider by calling 13 64 57 or visiting NILS.com.au.

You will be asked some questions to check your eligibility:

- Do you have a health care card/pension card or earn less than \$45,000 a year (\$60,000 if you're a couple or a person with dependants) after tax?

- How long have you lived in your current home?
- Do you have willingness and capacity to repay?

MoneySmart

The website is run by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) to help people increase their financial literacy and make the most of their money. The government website contains information and tools about budgeting and saving, investing, borrowing and credit, super and retirement and financial scams.

Visit moneysmart.gov.au

National debt helpline

If you're worried about debt, you can get free, independent and confidential advice from a financial counsellor by calling the National Debt Helpline on 1800 007 007 or visiting ndh.org.au. They can provide advice on:

- Utility bills including phone and internet
- Mortgage payments and rent
- Credit cards and personal loans
- Centrelink issues
- Joint debts
- General financial matters.

Service NSW

Service NSW is now the single point of contact for services like the Department of Fair Trading, Births, Deaths and Marriages, and Roads and Maritime Services.

They also run the Cost of Living program, designed to help you find NSW Government

- Family Energy rebate
- Active Kids voucher
- Pension Travel vouchers
- Gas rebates.

rebates and savings that are relevant to you, such as:

Call 13 77 88 or visit service.nsw.gov.au

Know of anymore?

Contact us on welfare@antiochian.org.au

LEGAL SERVICES

Redfern Legal Centre

has published a factsheet regarding the lockdown laws and police power. Please help to promote this useful resource to community networks.

<https://rlc.org.au/publication/factsheet-no-7-covid19-police-powers>

<https://rlc.org.au/sites/default/files/attachments/221021g1-NSW-COVID-19%20public-health-and-police-powers.pdf>

South-West Sydney Legal Centre

<https://www.swslc.org.au> flyer attached of services.

Services include:

- Free telephone legal advice in most areas of the law
- Free or reduced fee* assistance with the preparation of legal documents
- Free or reduced fee* legal representation for eligible individuals subject to available resources and priority ranking of matter type
- Free legal seminars for service providers, groups and the public

*fees are calculated on a sliding scale based on a client's income and assets. The fees we do charge go back into supporting our services.

PARENTING

COVID-19 Parenting Tips

Parenting during COVID-19 can be extra hard. It's normal to feel stressed and overwhelmed. Here are 6 tips to make things easier for you and your children.



Spend quality time with your children.

Just 5 minutes every day can make a big difference. It helps children feel loved and important.



Praise your child when they are behaving well.

Try praising your child or teenager for something they have done well. They may not show it, but you'll see them doing that good thing again. It will also reassure them that you notice and care.



Say the behaviour you want to see.

Use positive words when telling your child what to do; like "Please put your clothes away" (instead of "Don't make a mess").



Create a flexible but consistent daily routine.

Make a schedule for you and your children that has time for structured activities as well as free time. This can help children feel more secure and better behaved.



When children misbehave.

Catch difficult behaviour early and redirect your children with something interesting or fun.



Take care of yourself.

Talk to someone when you feel lonely. Take 5 deep breaths when you feel stress or anger. You are not alone.



Scan the QR code for more information from www.covid19parenting.com



unicef
for every child



End Violence
Against Children



The mark "COVID" is owned by the US Dept of Health and Human Services and is used with permission. Use of this mark is not an endorsement by the CDC or any other federal agency of any product, service, or organization.

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CHILDipod
HELP CHILDREN PROSPER



INTERNET
GOOD THINGS

UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

USAID
U.S. AID

UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

ONLINE SAFETY

Parent's guide to online sexual harassment and image-based abuse

eSafety is seeing an increase in reports of [image-based abuse \(IBA\)](#) by young people. IBA happens when an intimate image or video is shared, or threatened to be shared, without the consent of the person pictured.

[eSafety's parent guide to online sexual harassment and image-based abuse](#) is a FREE live webinar for parents and carers of young people aged 13-18, providing an understanding of online sexual harassment and image-based abuse.

[Register for the webinar](#) and visit esafety.gov.au for more resources and advice about keeping your family safer online.

Would you know what to do if your child was cyberbullied?

The eSafety Commissioner's new [video](#) for parents and carers has advice about cyberbullying and navigating online friendships.

One in five young Australians aged 8 to 17 years, say they have been socially excluded, threatened or abused online.

[Watch the video](#) and visit esafety.gov.au for more help, resources and advice about cyberbullying for [parents, carers](#), [kids](#) and [young people](#).

Stay Safe!