COVID-19 Guideline for In-Person Marriages in Prisons
Version 1, Revised 05/25/2022

Introduction

- The purpose of this guideline is to balance the need to for in-person marriages in prison settings with the appropriate COVID-19 mitigation strategies to reduce the risk of transmission.

Ceremony in Prisons

- Marriage ceremonies in prison will be applied for, arranged, and conducted in accordance with DOC 590.200 Marriages and State Registered Domestic Partnerships.
- Ceremonies will be scheduled outside the normal visit schedule.

COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies

- All outside participants and guests attending the ceremony must have a negative COVID-19 rapid antigen test onsite the day of the ceremony prior to entering the facility.
- Prior to the ceremony, the Incarcerated Individual participating in the marriage will be given an opportunity to select from two options for the ceremony that meet the standards associated with the current clinical guidance for COVID-19 mitigation.

Ceremony Option A

- All participants, to include the marriage couple, must wear a DOC-issued surgical mask at all times while onsite and throughout the entire ceremony process.
- Other than the marriage couple, all visitors, witnesses, etc. must remain physically distanced by 6 feet at all times while onsite and during the ceremony.
- Masks must remain on for entire ceremony, including for any pictures that are taken.
- No ceremonial kiss may occur during this option, but similar to visiting, a brief hug is allowed.
- If at any point the Incarcerated Individual and spouse remove/lower masks and engage in physical contact (i.e. kissing), the Incarcerated Individual will default to Option B below.

Ceremony Option B

- Once inside the area where the ceremony will occur, the marriage couple may remove masks for the entirety of the marriage ceremony, including for pictures.
- All other participants, visitors, witnesses, etc. must remain masked and physically distanced by 6 feet at all times while onsite and during the ceremony.
- The marriage couple may engage in an appropriate ceremonial physical kiss as part of the ceremony process.
- Immediately upon conclusion of the ceremony, the Incarcerated Individual will be escorted and placed on Intake Separation for 10 days under the protocols outlined in the current version of the WA State DOC COVID-19 Screening, Testing, and Infection Control Guideline.

Washington State Dept. of Corrections
Why the difference in marriage versus Extended Family Visiting (EFV COVID-19 mitigation strategies?)

COVID mitigation strategies are implemented not only to protect the participants in the activity, but also to prevent further transmission to the population within the facility. In the case of EFVs, both the length of the visit and repeat testing at the end of the visit lowers the likelihood of missing an asymptomatic infection in the visitor. Since marriage ceremonies, on the other hand, do not allow sufficient time to rule out early infection, a period of intake separation for the incarcerated participant is necessary to help prevent an outbreak in the facility.