



GUIDELINES FOR REOPENING THE ATRIUM

Guidelines have been adapted from the Montessori Public Policy Initiative 2020; CGSUSA's [Returning to the Atrium Resources](#), the SickKids [COVID-19: Guidance for School Reopening](#), Toronto Public Health's [COVID-19 Guidance for Day Camps](#), and Ontario's [Early Years Guidelines](#). These guidelines should be discussed with your pastor and implemented in accordance with the most up to date local diocesan or school and municipal health guidelines.

SCREENING



- Provide [self-screening guidelines](#) for all catechists and families.
- Grace and Courtesy Lessons surrounding self-screening can be offered in the L2 or L3 atrium.

HAND HYGIENE



- Hand washing or sanitizing before and after use of each atrium material is mandatory.
- Ensure hand washing or sanitizing for all children and adults upon entering or re-entering the atrium.
- Ensure hand washing or sanitizing before and after a child puts on or removes their mask.
- Offer Grace and Courtesy Lessons on Hand Washing and on Hand Sanitizing.
- Observation is essential to hand hygiene – checklists for the adults in the atrium may be helpful in guiding this new component of our work of observation.

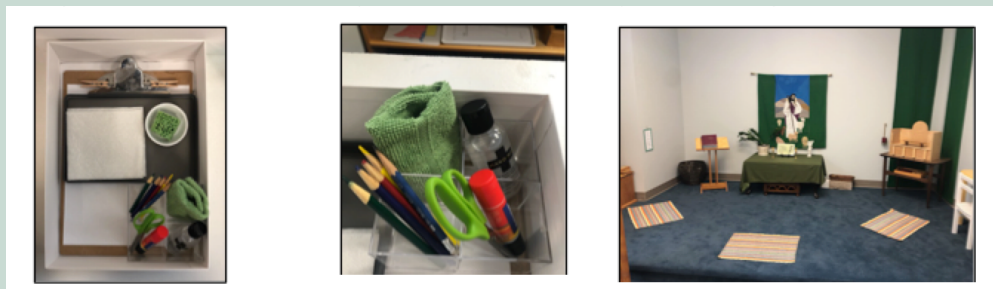
MASKS



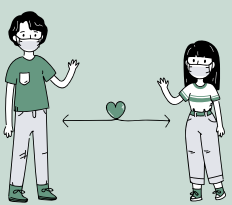
- Depending on your area, mask use is strongly recommended in the L1 and L2 atrium and mandatory in the L3 atrium (children at or above the age of 10 -- grade 4 and above -- must wear masks). They are mandatory for all catechists and atrium assistants. Please be aware that there are exemptions to the municipal mask by-laws for those who cannot wear a mask due to medical reasons, such as difficulty breathing or the inability to remove a mask without assistance. Proof of a medical condition is not required for these exemptions. Check with your local school and align your mask protocols with what the children are practicing there. Pastoral care should be taken in handling situations where a parent/child refuses to wear a mask.
- Offer Grace and Courtesy presentations on mask etiquette.
- Consider creating a designated mask-free space.

THE ENVIRONMENT: GROUP SIZE AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- Reduce class size according to the size of your atrium. The number of children per room should be based on both square footage and distancing requirements (2 metres or 6 feet apart is ideal, but 1 metre or 3 feet apart also provides protection, particularly for younger children). [Coronavirus classroom spacing calculators](#) can be found online.
- Keep siblings together.
- Keep the same adult with the same group of children (create cohorts).
- Consider working outside when possible.
- Children should have assigned workspaces (consider providing individual work rugs for each child, which they take home and wash each week or individual yoga mats cut in half which can be wiped down at the end of the atrium session). Help the children to properly distance from each other when working on the floor by marking the floor with an “X” for each rug/mat placement. The children would be assigned that same work space for the duration of the session. Arrange the altar area, baptism area and gestures area and/or mark the floor in these areas to indicate where only one child may work at a time.
- Materials such as colored pencils should be provided in a 1:1 ratio. Consider providing personal clipboards for writing, a cardboard box for storing each child’s work and a pencil set and glue stick of their own.



- Discuss with the children how you will gather to pray and sing. The children may enjoy simply humming and/or using sign language and actions to music or talking the words with rhythm (spiritual rap!). Introducing musical instruments such as the “Music Maker” (a miniature stringed harpsicord) or gentle percussion instruments like triangles and rhythm sticks, open opportunities for some great expression of prayer!
- Keep cubbies/coat hooks at a certain distance (perhaps, children could leave their coats with their parents) or line up / wait on “2 meter” distance markers when hanging up or putting on their coats and outdoor foot wear.
- Use Grace and Courtesy presentations to establish new routines, particularly in regard to arrival and dismissal, interrupting, asking a question, asking for help, and communal prayer. Ask the children to participate in the creation of these new routines. Think through your timing to ensure good flow in the working environment.



Take the time needed to orient children to the environment. Our primary goal at this time is for them is to stay connected to the Church.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING



- A regular cleaning schedule should be implemented with emphasis on high touch surfaces.
- The atrium should be cleaned and sanitized between groups of children.
- Shared materials can be cleaned after each use or become one-time use materials to be cleaned at the end of a session. When proper hand hygiene has been followed, materials can be used more than once within a session.
- Exercises of practical life may need to be removed if they involve materials that could trap and contain the virus without an easy way of being disinfected. e.g. lentils for pouring and wet sponges for plant washing, unless refreshed with each use.
- Include the children in cleaning routines during and at the end of the atrium session. Whenever practical, the cleaning of material should be incorporated into presentations.
- Consider setting up a station for an adult to do the cleaning of such things as laminated booklets, tracing card packets and scripture cards for rotation back into use by other children during the same session.
- [Cleaning and disinfecting guidelines for specific Atrium materials from CGSUSA](#)
- [List of cleaning and disinfecting products for Montessori materials](#)

DROP OFF / PICK UP PROCEDURES



- Ensure social distancing at drop-off and pick-up by staggering drop off and pick up times.
- Prevent parents/guardians from congregating near the door to the atrium or in hallways near the atrium.
- No parents / guardians / visitors can be allowed in the atrium.

CREATE A COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN

Keep accurate attendance records for contact tracing.



- Positive COVID-19 tests in volunteers or children participating in the atrium should be communicated to the parish priest so that your diocesan protocol for positive cases can be followed. We will follow the direction of local health officials relating to the communication of positive tests publicly while not identifying any individuals.
- Any child/volunteer who has tested positively for COVID-19 may not return to the Atrium environment until they are cleared by public health to do so.
- Any child/volunteer who has been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19 should follow the direction of local public health officials before returning to the program.

ALTERNATIVE MODELS AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING



1. We return using a Retreat Model: children would attend every other week or once per month either independently or with parents. Additional work is sent home for completion in the domestic church.
2. We return to the atrium for a brief period, during which we prepare children for sheltering at home during a 2nd wave -- preparations can be made for work during Advent, preparing the Messianic prophecy cards, preparing the nativity figures and backgrounds.
3. We do not return to the atrium but support the Domestic Church through resources and/or online sessions.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS



- The importance of using cleaning products that are safe for children.
- The effects of restricted movement on differently abled children.

CLEANING SPECIFIC ATRIUM MATERIALS: from CGSUSA

FABRIC: Folding cloth, altar linens, prayer cloths, vestments of the priest, chasubles from liturgical colours, and rugs. There is not much research about how long the virus lives on fabric, but it is probably not as long as on hard surfaces. The soft, porous surfaces found in clothing may help prevent the spread. Health professionals explain the virus is likely to get caught in the fibers of the fabric, preventing it from spreading. Avoid shaking dirty laundry. This will minimize the possibility of dispersing virus through the air. Most items can be laundered at the warmest temperature safe for the fabric. Fabrics, such as, the liturgical colors may be more difficult to wash daily, so back to hand washing before and after working with the materials can be the safest response.

LAND and WATER GLOBE: We contacted Nienhuis Montessori concerning the sandpaper globe, and while we realize that not everyone has purchased a land and water globe from Nienhuis, and some of us have made our own globe, they offered us these ideas for cleaning and sanitizing: Use Pledge to clean, because it is not super harsh. To disinfect, use Lysol wipes. We asked about Lysol spray, and she said a spray is TOO wet. In fact, be careful that your Lysol wipes are not too wet. You want them damp, of course, but not TOO wet, just a little damp.

PAPER BASE MATERIALS such as Bibles, Little Gospels, and tracing packets may hold the virus anywhere from a few hours to a few days. Disinfecting books and paper would be difficult. A solution may be to have a rotating supply of bibles and other paper materials.

WOOD MATERIAL: The sheepfold, the merchant's house, dioramas, the Liturgical calendar, etc. Use Pledge to clean because it is not super harsh. To disinfect, use Lysol wipes. Remember to only use damp cloth, nothing too wet. Are your wood items sealed? If not, you may want to do that now.

COLOURED PENCILS: Can be first cleaned with soap and hot water, then Lysol wipes to disinfect.

PLASTIC TRAYS, LAMINATED ITEMS: timelines, mute strips, charts, etc. Some of you may not have laminated items in your atrium. If you do, those items may be wiped down with a Lysol wipe. Plastic trays can be washed with soapy water then disinfected.

PAINTED FIGURES: The Good Shepherd and the sheep, the merchant, the bridesmaids, the Good Samaritan, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, etc. can be carefully wiped down with a damp soapy cloth or a disinfectant sprayed on to a cloth. Always be cautious since everyone's materials are different. Sealed wood pieces are easier to clean and tend to last longer.

SCULPEY: Infancy Narrative or Cenacle figures, etc. We have contacted Sculpey and their recommendation is to use a cleaning spray with a trigger (non-aerosol) on the item and then hand wash with soap and water and dry. They do not have any information on the effects of cleaning products used on the figures over time.