

NYSED/DOH Guidance Regarding Disinfection

Education Law § 409-i mandates that all school districts use environmentally-friendly cleaning products registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”). The NYS Commissioner of General Services issues a list of allowable products. Stronger cleaning products, such as bleach, may only be used if there is no EPA-registered product capable of doing the job.

In 2018, NYSED cooperated with the NYS Department of Health (“DOH”) to publish a memorandum regarding school influenza preparedness and mitigation. The memorandum is available online at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/schoolhealth/schoolhealthservices/InfluenzaGuidanceFebruary2018.html>

[Influenza Guidance February 2018 - p12.nysed.gov](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/schoolhealth/schoolhealthservices/InfluenzaGuidanceFebruary2018.html)

(1) If registered disinfectants are not available, a chlorine bleach solution may be used - add one tablespoon of bleach to a quart (4 cups) of water, or smaller batches can be made from one teaspoon of bleach in pint (2 cups) of water.

www.p12.nysed.gov

A section of that memorandum dealt with facility cleaning. The memorandum advised school districts to use normal EPA-registered products to disinfect schools during flu season. It stated: “[i]f choosing to use disinfectants, be certain they are EPA registered and use them according to the manufacturer’s instructions.” The memorandum advised school districts to “[r]outinely clean schools as normal with special attention to surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as: desks and countertops; doorknobs, faucet handles & other handles; and computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, and phones.” Regarding bleach, the memorandum advised school districts to only use it as a last resort. The memorandum limited use of bleach to situations where “registered disinfectants are not available.”

The NYSED/DOH memorandum explained that standard cleaning practices are sufficient to kill influenza viruses, because the virus dies quickly in the environment. The memorandum stated:

*... viruses are relatively fragile, so standard practices, such as cleaning with soap and water, can help remove and kill them. Studies have shown that the flu virus can live and potentially infect a person for only two to eight hours after being deposited on a surface. **Therefore, special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning, including closing schools to clean every surface in the building, are not necessary or recommended to slow the spread of flu, even during a flu outbreak. Therefore, general cleaning products normally used are sufficient. Additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is not recommended.***

The guidance from NYSED and the DOH is clear. They recommend that normal cleaning products are sufficient to treat facilities, and they do not recommend additional disinfecting procedures.