

APPLETREE COVID-19 Supplemental Awards

Informed Green Solutions

Introduction

In early 2021, ASTHO, with support from CDC's National Center for Environmental Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), announced awards to five state health agencies to support their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. State health agencies in Kentucky, Virginia, Arkansas, Vermont, and Indiana were selected for this opportunity because of their recent application to ATSDR's Partnership to Promote Local Efforts to Reduce Environmental Exposure (APPLETREE) cooperative agreement program. Vermont requested that ASTHO work directly with their partner organization, [Informed Green Solutions \(IGS\)](#), for this project. ASTHO provided funding and assistance to the recipient state health agencies and state health agency partners to support their environmental health-related COVID-19 response activities. This factsheet outlines planned activities and their associated outcomes under these awards for the Vermont Department of Health's partner organization, IGS.

Planned Activities

IGS, a longtime [partner](#) of the Vermont Department of Health, "provides education and technical assistance on how to transition to a more sustainable footprint through your purchasing decisions." IGS has experience providing resources, consultations, and trainings on green cleaning and effective infection control in school settings. Its proposed activities focused on informing schools and early care and education (ECE) programs about effective, safe COVID-19 mitigation protocols. Activities planned as part of this award included:

- Engaging with stakeholders to host virtual meetings and workshops with K-12 schools and ECE programs to provide information on safe and effective COVID-19 mitigation protocols, including protecting students and staff from harmful environmental exposures (such as from chemical disinfectants).
 - Engaged stakeholders include: [Vermont Head Start Association](#), [Vermont Superintendents Association](#), [Building Bright Futures](#), [North Country Supervisory Union](#), [Vermont Child Development Division – Child Care Licensing](#), [Orleans Central Supervisory Union](#), [Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union](#), [Let's Grow Kids](#), [Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children](#), and [Caledonia and Essex Resource and Referral Service Agency](#).
- Consulting with K-12 schools and ECE programs to ensure their facilities' COVID-19 mitigation measures follow federal and state guidance for lowering the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission while protecting students and staff from harmful environmental exposures.
- Customizing and/or developing multiple factsheets or policy templates/guidance documents on the topic of safe infection control for K-12 schools and ECE programs.

Project Outcomes

The primary focus of IGS's efforts was reviewing and updating guidance around proper, safe cleaning and disinfection methods for COVID-19 mitigation, engaging with Vermont K-12 schools and ECE programs to disseminate this information, and evaluating the cleaning and disinfecting products and practices each facility used.

Throughout the project, IGS met with different stakeholder groups, K-12 schools, and ECE programs (both virtually and in-person) to review the latest guidance on how to properly, safely, and effectively use cleaning and disinfecting products and practices to help mitigate COVID-19 transmission. In addition to providing information on safe cleaning and disinfection, IGS evaluated K-12 school and ECE programs' current cleaning and disinfection practices, offering customized guidance and suggestions for safely optimizing these activities. If any of the products or practices were outdated or used incorrectly, IGS provided information on how and why they needed to be updated or changed. In all, IGS reached 68 K-12 schools and 51 ECE programs in Vermont through their presentations and evaluations.

Project Challenges and Barriers

During this project, IGS encountered several challenges and barriers:

- It proved difficult to ensure that the guidance materials developed and the stakeholder contact lists compiled were current and timely. SARS-CoV-2 mitigation guidance was updated often with new information that impacted what IGS shared with K-12 schools and ECE programs.
- Visiting in-person was not an option for many of the K-12 schools and ECE programs. Staff were often busy and preferred keeping visitors to a minimum to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure. To address this, IGS reached out to professional organizations that focused on K-12 schools and ECE programs to work on scheduling their virtual and onsite meetings, which did come with its own issues as detailed below.
- Connecting with the professional organizations that focused on K-12 schools and ECE programs for this work was challenging. While IGS worked with these organizations in the past, many of those contacted had competing needs and priorities, making collaboration a challenge. Those who did engage with IGS were typically already aware of the COVID-19-related issues around indoor air quality and safe cleaning and disinfection, leaving K-12 schools and ECE programs that needed the most support likely underserved.

Reflections and Final Thoughts

Some final thoughts and lessons learned throughout the project included the following:

- Developing and maintaining partnerships was one of the major needs and challenges IGS dealt with during this project. However, these partnerships were necessary to work efficiently with K-12 schools and ECE programs to ensure safe and effective COVID-19 protocols were being followed. Having written support and acknowledgement of the project from the Vermont Department of Health that IGS could have shared during initial outreach would likely have helped with engagement.
- Beginning conversations with key partners and decision-makers earlier in the project would likely have made it easier to develop relationships and identify K-12 school/ECE program points of contact quickly, which was necessary given the short project timeline.
- Despite the challenges, the feedback from the K-12 schools and ECE programs regarding the support IGS provided was extremely positive.

Resources Developed or Customized

The resources and information below were developed, updated, or customized for use with this project:

- [Green Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Toolkit for Early Care and Education](#)
- [Infection Control Handbook for Schools](#)
- [Cleaning for Health in Schools Assessment Form and Report Template](#)
- [Disinfectants Comparison Chart](#)