

Meet Henry the Hand: A crusading doctor's right-hand man

January 17 2014, by Serena Gordon, Healthday Reporter



Dr. Will Sawyer and Henry the Hand.

Cartoon character helps physician spread the gospel of good hand hygiene.

(HealthDay)—When Dr. Will Sawyer, an infection prevention specialist, dropped off his young children at day care in the late 1980s, he saw something most parents rarely notice: germs, and lots of them.

To Sawyer, happy kids playing with other [children](#) and toys meant the potential spread of infectious diseases, like the flu and [common cold](#). He knew then that he had to come up with a fun way to teach his children good [hand hygiene](#). What he didn't know was that 25 years later, he'd still be teaching children how to avoid catching illnesses that are spread via hands.

To do this, he created a cartoon character named Henry the Hand,

picking a hand because hands play such a significant role in the spread of [infectious diseases](#). When hands touch a surface or someone else's hand, they can pick up viruses and bacteria. If those hands then touch eyes, nose or mouth before they're washed, the germs have a quick route into the body, where they'll make the person sick.

To lessen the chance of catching such bugs, "Henry" taught Sawyer's kids four important principles of hand hygiene awareness:

- Wash your hands whenever they're dirty and always before eating
- Do not cough into your hands
- Do not sneeze into your hands
- Above all, do not put your fingers into your eyes, nose or mouth (the "T" zone)

Sawyer and his cartoon-hand sidekick soon started teaching their principles of hand awareness at daycare centers and schools. "Henry" was soon invited to medical conferences.

Asked if he was the one who wore the Henry the Hand costume at public events, Sawyer coyly answered, "Nobody knows who Superman is."

Today, Sawyer, who lives in Cincinnati, has five costumes that he sends around the country to school and community events. He has also started a new program for [high school students](#) that lets them earn community service hours for teaching [young children](#) about the importance of good hand hygiene.

"We want to get everybody at their schools and in their communities to talk to each other about hand-washing behaviors," Sawyer said. "Let's get the word out and reduce the number of flu and flu-like illnesses."

More information: Read this HealthDay story to learn why [hand](#)

hygiene is so important to your health.

Health News

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Citation: Meet Henry the Hand: A crusading doctor's right-hand man (2014, January 17)
retrieved 7 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-01-henry-crusading-doctor-right-hand.html>

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