

'Handshake-free zones' may be coming to health care settings

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(HealthDay)—Regulations to restrict handshakes in the health care setting, along with more robust hand hygiene programs, may help limit the spread of disease, according to a viewpoint published online May 15 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Mark Sklansky, M.D., from the University of California in Los Angeles, and colleagues acknowledge that the handshake has a profound cultural role and holds interpersonal significance, as well as commercial importance. While providers' handshakes with patients can be perceived as signs of compassion, they can also spread germs.

The authors propose that lessons from smoking bans should be applied to handshakes. Given that warnings of smoking's harms and subsequent bans were able to cut a deeply entrenched habit, the same may be possible with handshakes. "Handshake-free zones" should be established along with educational programs and signage. A replacement gesture

may need to be adopted also.

"Removing the handshake from the [health care](#) setting may ultimately become recognized as an important way to protect the health of patients and caregivers, rather than as a personal insult to whoever refuses another's hand," the authors write.

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