



# e-quilibrium

- *“electronic briefs on behavior and health”*

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## Hands

I don't remember how young I was when I learned to wash my hands, but I know I wasn't very old. I was specifically taught to wash my hands before eating and after using the bathroom. As a parent, I have taught my children to wash their hands. My guess is that you have had the same experience. Hand washing – it is actually a very simple behavior.

Why, then, do restaurants need to post the following sign near the sinks in their restrooms? --- “Employees must wash their hands before returning to work.” In other restrooms, including health care settings, one finds the reminder that “hand washing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of disease.”

There is a Clean Hands Coalition, “a unified alliance of public and private partners working together to create and support coordinated, sustained initiatives to significantly improve health and save lives through clean hands.” Members include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Henry the Hand Foundation, among many others. The Coalition is sponsoring National Clean Hands Week, September 18-24, 2005.

Millions, if not billions, of dollars are spent reminding health care professionals as well as the general public to do what our parents taught us when we were very young --- wash our hands! Why? Because “Clean Hands Save Lives” --- the slogan for National Clean Hands Week.

Many behaviors that impact health are rather complex and difficult to maintain and/or change. However, there are other health-related behaviors that are quite simple, but at times easily overlooked --- like hand washing. Indeed, hand washing tends to be (or not be) a habit, and habits can be difficult to initiate or change. But the behavior itself is very simple and resources to have clean hands are plentiful. When soap and water aren't accessible, waterless hand products tend to be available.

That's it! This month's brief on behavior and health is simple. Wash your hands! Don't be caught dirty handed! Join me in following Henry the Hand's motto: "spread the word, not the germs!"

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