

# Want a healthier life? Stop shaking hands and start fist-bumping.

[www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/07/28/want-a-healthier-life-stop-shaking-hands-and-start-fist-bumping/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/07/28/want-a-healthier-life-stop-shaking-hands-and-start-fist-bumping/)



U.S. Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) bumps fists with his wife, Michelle, before his speech at his South Dakota and Montana presidential primary election night rally in St. Paul, Minn., June 3, 2008. (Eric Miller/Reuters)

In the modern zeitgeist of American politics, few moments carry more pop culture clout than that of The Fist Bump. Even the uninitiated surely recall “The fist bump heard ‘round the world,” as the Washington Post [put it](#) the day afterward.

It involved two fists and a future first couple. As Barack Obama walked across the St. Paul, Minn., stage to accept the Democratic nomination in June of 2008, he gently bumped his fist into his wife’s. “Dap, fist pound, whatever you want to call it — it’s definitely something we’re not used to seeing on the national political stage,” [wrote](#) the Post’s Amy Argetsinger and Roxanne Roberts.

But maybe we should. It’s the safest way to exchange pleasantries and “ritualistic touching,” according to a fresh study published today in the American Journal of Infection Control. “People rarely think about the health implications of shaking hands,” [said](#) Dave Whitworth of Aberystwyth University in a statement. “If the general public could be encouraged to fist-bump, there is genuine potential to reduce the spread of infectious disease.”

Humans are big on touching each other during daily interactions. We pat heads, touch shoulders, high five and even, in the proper sporting setting, slap a few bums. “Ritualistic touching on meeting is important in diverse cultures across the world and a great variety of such greetings exist,” the study states. “For instance, the traditional hongi greeting of the New Zealand Maori involves pressing noses and foreheads together.”

But getting that up, close and personal carries risk. Same goes for shaking hands.

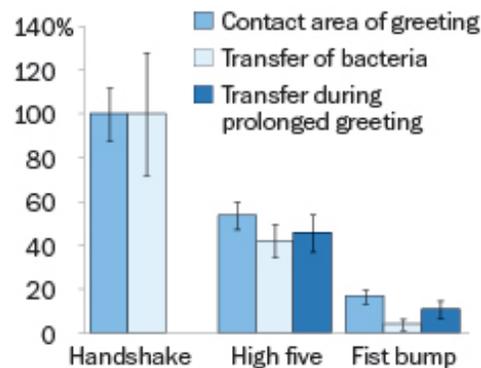
So to crack the hand-shaking paradox, the Aberystwyth researchers devised an experiment. One greeter immersed a sterile-gloved hand into a “dense culture” of bacteria and then performed a three well-trod forms of greeting: shaking hands, high-fiving and bumping fists.

Or, as the research paper prefers to call it, “dap.”

“This experimental model provides evidence that dap greetings result in reduced transmission of bacteria between participants compared with a handshake,” the study said. Fist bumps transmitted the fewest germs, followed by a “prolonged” fist bump (awkward much?), followed by a high five and then a prolonged high five. Last was the handshake.

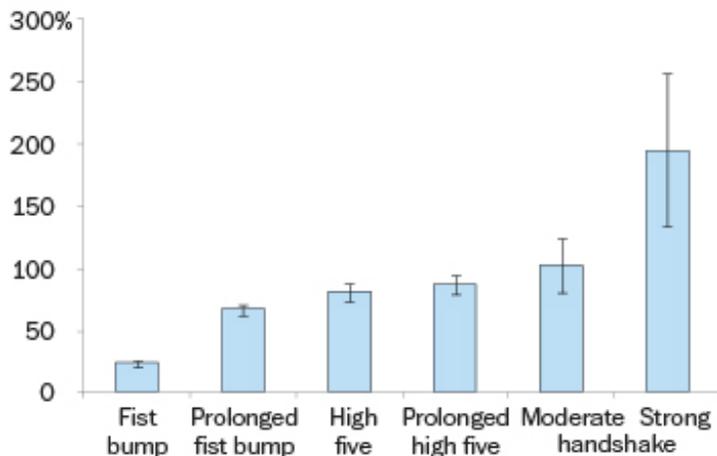
### Transfer of bacteria in three greetings

Percentage relative to mean value for moderate handshake



### Transfer per area of contact

In the greetings as a percentage relative to mean value for moderate handshake



Source: “The fist bump: A more hygienic alternative to the handshake,” American Journal of Infection Control. The Washington Post

This is because the handshake necessitates more flesh-to-flesh contact and lasts longer than your average fist-bump or high five. Plus, the stronger the grip, the more germs are spread. “The high transmission level observed for handshakes does not appear to be purely a function of its large contact area,” the study said, “but also depends on duration and strength. Transmission is greater with increased duration and grip, which presumably increases the intimacy of association between hands.”

Translation: Not all handshakes are made equal. A strong handshake, the research showed, shed more than twice the number of bacteria than a “moderate handshake.”

So go easy with the grip, champ, people are trying to stay healthy out there.