

## Henry the Hand urges hand-washing

**Mascot named Henry delivers good, clean fun.**

By Richard A. Marini

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The Gates Elementary School fifth-graders likely didn't know it's International Clean Hands Week.

Likely, they didn't care.

But they seemed to thoroughly enjoy the fact that there was a giant, yellow, inflatable mascot called “Henry the Hand” to greet them in their morning gym class.

“He's cool,” Paul Delgado said when asked what he thought of Henry.

The giant hand, played this day by Melissa Ahearn, was making his San Antonio debut — teaching the kids the importance of personal hygiene and how proper hand-washing can help keep them from getting sick.

“It's the beginning of flu season, so it's important that they know this,” said Stephen Chavez, a representative of San Antonio-based Kleenhanz, manufacturer of sanitizing towelette of the same name that, along with H-E-B, sponsored the event.

Henry the Hand was created by the Clean Hands Coalition, a partnership of public and private organizations that promotes programs designed to improve health through clean hands.

The coalition is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which contends that proper hand-washing is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of many types of diseases.

Some of the kids seemed to already know the drill. Asked how long it takes to properly wash their hands, several shouted “20 seconds!” And they correctly told Chavez they could time themselves by humming the “Happy Birthday” song twice, or the “ABC” song once.

Several also correctly demonstrated the “vampire sneeze” — sneezing into the crook in their elbow rather than their hand to keep from spreading germs.

Jyrena Jones, another fifth-grader, said she knew some of what she'd heard, but that “it's good to be reminded.”

Following Chavez's presentation, he played Henry's theme song, a jaunty little number called “Doin' the Henry Hand Wash” that borrows the melody from the song “Hand Jive”:

I know a guy named Henry the Hand/He spreads hand-washing all over the land.

While none of the kids took Chavez up on his offer to dance with Henry (they are in fifth grade, after all),

most were willing to give him or hug or a high-five.

An estimated 78 million people become ill each year from food-borne illness, and 5,000 die. Many of these cases are due to by poor hand-washing, according to the [CDC](#).

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