

## MDS Alert

### Reader Question: Don't Count on Elbow Bumps as Safe Alternative

**Question:** Many of our residents are really missing the connection and attention they used to receive through touch. One resident in particular enjoyed his daily walks and liked to give staff high fives. A lot of staff members have made do with elbow bumps instead, but I'm getting worried, with the uptick in cases, that even this isn't a safe alternative. Is there any research available on the safety of elbow bumps?

Minnesota Subscriber



**Answer:** Elbow bumps probably aren't a safe way to make contact while also avoiding transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, researchers say. In the June 2020 Journal of Public Health, **Haixia Liu, Liang Gao,** and **Chenyu Sun** note that before the COVID-19 pandemic, many people employed the etiquette of coughing or sneezing into their elbows instead of their hands. However, SARS-CoV-2 has been found to survive on cloth surfaces for up to eight hours; additionally, bumping elbows would put the participants within 6 feet of one another. Since it's not convenient to change clothes after every cough or sneeze, nor recommended to violate social distancing guidelines, the researchers say that the elbow bump probably is not safe.

Even though social distancing (or physical distancing) guidelines aren't necessarily realistic in the nursing or skilled nursing setting, it's probably safest to switch to some kind of "air" greeting. Don't forget to smile with your eyes!