It’s time to make the handshake history: but what comes next?

The outbreak of COVID-19 has shaken up our world in so many ways. The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is suggesting our most common greeting – the handshake - should be confined to history, in whatever our ‘new normal’ looks like post-pandemic.

The first handshakes date back more than 2,000 years to ancient Greece, as a symbol of peace to show neither person was carrying a weapon.

‘Even before the arrival of coronavirus, there’s been a sense that the handshake may have had its day,’ said PHAA CEO Terry Slevin.

‘Most of us have been high-fiving for many years and in more recent times, we’ve seen even US President Obama adopt the uber-cool fist bump.

‘In these health conscious COVID-19 times, handshakes have been replaced by new meet and greet options. Our Prime Minister has led the way with his preferred elbow bump. Others test their balancing skills with a slightly awkward foot tap.’

Mr Slevin says he’s happy to lead the charge, and a national debate, on exactly what greeting Australians should adopt should we decide to retire the not-so-healthy handshake.

‘As we’ve emerged from lockdown and started returning to our workplaces, sporting venues and social meeting places, there’s a distinct nervousness and unease about how we should greet each other.

‘Confining the handshake to history makes good sense but humans like to adhere to social norms and we need to find a new common greeting as a popular substitute.

‘There’s no doubt the traditional hug and kiss are off limits until further notice, so we’ve looked for what’s been practiced across the world to help us quickly move on from our handshake hangover.

‘Our new social distancing practices immediately rule out options like the Maori nose rub, the European air kiss, the Greenland face sniff, and the pressing of cheeks from Pacific Polynesia.

‘Poking your tongues out Tibetan style might not pass the pub test, nor might the touching of shoulders as practised by men in the Democratic Republic of Congo.’

The PHAA has identified four greeting options which Australia might take the global lead on by putting forward to the nation in a plebiscite (or at the very least a Twitter vote). Importantly, all four comfortably meet all social distancing requirements:

1. **Clapping hands**: In Zimbabwe, the first person claps once and the second person claps twice.

2. **Hand on heart**: A greeting in Malaysia and adopted by international sporting teams pre-game when singing national anthems.
3. **The bow:** Popular in many Asian countries, often with hands clasped in front.

4. **Thumbs up:** A universally positive gesture, and the double thumbs up sends an extra special message.

Of course there’ll be some who believe Australia doesn’t need a new greeting at all, happy to continue with the much-loved verbal hello; the simple Aussie G’DAY!

Let the great greeting debate begin...

View PHAA’s article ‘Let’s make the handshake history’

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