

Hannah Montana' star spreads clean hands message

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The buzz started when the Mitchel Musso "Clean Hands are Cool Hands" posters went up last week in the restrooms at Goforth Elementary School in League City.

"Is he here?" one fifth-grade girl asked another.

"If he was, I'd be drooling right now," the other replied.

She got her chance Tuesday when Musso, the 17-year-old actor best known for his role as Oliver in the Disney Channel series "Hannah Montana," bounded into the school's auditorium packed with more than 1,000 excited students.

Driving home the message that "it's cool to wash your hands," Musso, wearing a knit cap and Goforth t-shirt, taught the students tricks for effective hand washing.

"Sing Happy Birthday two times while you wash," he told the students, explaining that it takes a couple minutes for soap and water to kill germs.

He also led them in a rap song - "Start up high, then do the sides. To be extra clean, wash in between. Get the backs and below, remember to go really slow."

Musso, who had an easy rapport with the kids, invited several students to come forward and ask questions.

"How many times a day do you wash your hands?" At least seven to eight was his answer.

"When should you wash your hands?" Before eating, after using the bathroom, after eating. And of course a lot when you're sick.

"Is hot or cold water better?" Hot and cold with soap are equally good at killing germs but warm water feels better.

The only question not related to hand-washing came from nine-year-old Jared Willis, who asked Musso how he liked being on TV.



"Hannah Montana" television star Mitchel Musso chats with Goforth student Jared Willis during his "Clean Hands are Cool Hands" talk

Musso responded that he liked the fact that being a celebrity allows him to be a role model for kids.

James Vincent, M.D., a pediatric emergency medicine physician at Clear Lake Regional Medical Center in Webster, joined Musso in educating the students and answering some of the tougher questions. With the aid of a black light and an overhead projector, Vincent showed the students how many germs can collect on an unwashed hand, and how using a hand sanitizer can kill them.

Musso, who is originally from Rockwell, Texas, is joining with the HCA Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Hospital Corporation of America, in its "Clean Hands are Cool Hands" campaign to prevent the spread of disease. Clear Lake Regional Medical Center, an HCA-affiliated hospital, made sure that each child at Goforth received a book mark, hand sanitizer, a postcard autographed by Musso and a CD with hand-washing information.

Musso, who now lives in Los Angeles, said he was attracted to the "Clean Hands" campaign because disease prevention can be so simple.

"When I was that age if I had a role model telling me to wash my hands because the girls like it, of course I'd be washing all the time," he said. "Good role models are what we're trying to be."

Musso, who is on a two-week break from shooting the Hannah Montana show, said he hopes to get to as many schools and hospitals as he can to spread the message.

Asked if his hand-washing campaign extends to his fellow television stars, he joked, "We try to keep a pretty germ-free set."

For more information on Musso and the "Clean Hands" campaign, go to www.cleanhandsarecoolhands.com.