

Tim ([00:02](#)):

Hey Groovers. This is Tim with a note about this podcast. Kurt and I produce what you're about to hear as an episode for our other podcast called weekly grooves, which is a look at the week's headlines through a behavioral lens. We thought it was important to share it with you, our faithful listeners of behavioral grooves because it's so topical. Also, we wanted to give you a glimpse of what weekly groove sounds like. If you like what you hear in this short reflection of the headlines through a behavioral lens, please check out weekly grooves. We hope you enjoy

Tim ([00:42](#)):

[Weekly Grooves Intro Music]. Welcome to Weekly Grooves. My name is Tim Houlihan.

Kurt ([00:45](#)):

and I'm Kurt Nelson. In the weekly news podcast, we take topics that are in the headlines from this week and we talk about them through a [inaudible] lens. We try to get at the why behind why we do what we do. Yeah, it's a weekly look at what's going on from a uniquely human level. Hey, can I guess what our topic is going to be for the week? You can try. You can try. I don't think you'll get it, but you can try.

Tim ([01:09](#)):

Is it Coronavirus? Oh my God.

Kurt ([01:11](#)):

How'd you guess?

Tim ([01:11](#)):

Well, I have the notes.

Kurt ([01:13](#)):

True. Very true. I should've known that. Right. I guess it wasn't a guess. Then. Obviously this topic has dominated the news cycle for the past few weeks. It ticks off all of the behavioral science points for a very vivid fear inducing hysteria building event, but we are going to be looking at it through a behavioral lens.

Tim ([01:34](#)):

In particular, Michael Hollingsworth wrote an article, wait, wait, wait. The Dr. Michael Hall's worth, who is like two time guest on our podcast. Behavioral grooves. Yes. That Michael Hall's, as I was saying, Michael wrote an article for behavioral scientists that was titled hand-washing can stop a virus, so why don't we do it? Which takes a look at why we as humans have a pretty powerful method for preventing the spread of coven 19 yet we don't really do it all that often. Yeah, that sounds great. Let's dig in. Okay. So the premise for the article, if you didn't get it from the title was hand-washing works, but we really don't do it very well. And so the, the, you know, Michael quoted the world health organization, uh, where they were warning countries to do everything you can in order to prepare for a pandemic. Okay. So why don't we, yeah.

Speaker 1 ([02:28](#)):

So why don't we wash our hands? Well, it starts with lack of awareness, right? There's a lot of people who just don't know. Right. And so Michael brings up this in his article, he says, look, lack of awareness of how effective it is, right? And that educational campaigns have, we've, we've known this for years, they put these educational campaigns out all the time for just the normal flu for colds, for all of those types of, any type of, of transmittable disease. Washing our hands is a really powerful thing. Yet we don't, we don't do it. Yeah. Q, the GI Joe effect, the information is out there, but we're not acting on it. So telling us, uh, in and of itself doesn't change behavior. Definitely. And so, you know, part of that is I think that washing hands is already a behavior that we do. Yeah, it's familiar.

Speaker 1 ([03:17](#)):

It's familiar and it's, and it's only associated right now, it's only associated with w usually like after you go to the bathroom, right? That's the social norm. You wash your hands then right? May very well maybe before we we eat. But for many people, you know, that's the times when you do it, it seems a pretty normal element. Um, and the other aspect of this is that washing our hands feels pretty trivial because it's so familiar. It's so familiar. Washing our hands is an everyday thing. It's not, it's not like buying the mask to put on my face to prevent the coronavirus from getting in or not going to the Timberwolves game because it's a big public arena. Those are, those are big things that I'm doing. Washing my hands, I wash my hands, I'm just, you got gotta wash my hands more. It doesn't feel as powerful.

Speaker 1 ([04:10](#)):

And we'll get back to that. About how about washing your hands? Because I think that that dessert, that's a big, big deal. But another key issue of why we don't do it is cause there's, there's friction, right? We don't always have hand sanitizer nearby. Yeah. It's not convenient and so French and you know, Roger Dooley, again, another guest that we had on our past pod, our other podcast, behavioral groups talked about friction and, and the impact that even a little bit of friction in our lives really inhibits behavior. And so the, the lack of having a sink available after I sneeze, right? I'm going to go, go to the bathroom and I got to go all the way downstairs to go to the bathroom and wash my hands or to the sink. Or if you're in a big public place, it might mean leaving a meeting or a heading down a long hallway or stairs.

Speaker 1 ([04:53](#)):

And that's all that's friction that gets in the way of us doing it. Right. And, and washing our hands takes time if we do it right. Have you ever tried timing yourself? 20 seconds. It feels like forever to wash your hands. You know, you're supposed to, what does it sing? Sing the ABC song. [inaudible] the same song, right? Isn't it? Yeah. So anyways, um, you know, but, but trying to do that for that is, is really, yeah, it feels like forever. Get halfway through. I'm, I'm about LMN and I'm wanna, I'm done. You know, it's like the ABC song, right? There you go. I'm usually a B, C I'm done. Washer, water done. Hey, there you go. But, um, the other thing, there was a, we don't wash our hands right in, in the first place. Um, and I saw a video of a woman, I thought it was the best video I see.

Speaker 1 ([05:45](#)):

And we'll try to find it and put it in the show notes where she used paint instead of water and soap. And so she had blue paint and she showed kind of how you normally wash your hands. And then she pointed it up and Oh my gosh, she could see all of the skin that the paint did not get out. And so then she did a little bit more where she put her fingers together between her fingers and did the backs of her hand

because those were all just skid but still didn't cover still. You had a whole bunch of stuff around your, your tips of your fingers and different things that you thumbs are wide open and the sides of your hand, so we don't do well. So maybe taking 20 seconds is just because to do it well, you got to do all those takes.

Speaker 1 ([06:22](#)):

Yeah, yeah. We can also feel overwhelmed. Oh yeah. Another big part of this is that we can, the vividness in the media, this whole a availability heuristic can just overwhelm us with the constant barrage of messaging and we will, and it's so easy to feel like, Oh man, what can I do? Right? And I'm helpless in this emotionally drained from that. So we just give up. We don't do anything. If it's going to happen, it's going to happen. I don't have any control over this anyway. So therefore why even try and it's hard to connect to a big picture. We've, we've, we, we just talked with Debra Small about this idea that we're much more willing to connect to an issue if there is an identifiable victim. If you and I knew someone who was, who came down with the Corona virus, it would totally change our behavior.

Speaker 1 ([07:07](#)):

But when it's very abstract and large, it's hard to connect to. Exactly. All right. So what does behavioral science say about improving how often and how well we wash our hands. So one thing is that, as Michael Hall's worth pointed out, is we got to get a lot better at communication. So yes, the GI Joe imp, uh, effect is there, but also just the way that we message this. Uh, he, he talked about some research that they, where they tested different messages and in particular how the personalized messages impacted genders differently. Women responded more to, uh, soap kills germs where men responded to gusting kind of thing. Right. Um, and so gender seems to be an important factor for would have known unless we tested it right. Unless may actually went on. Tessa, you know, and could that be exposed on, could that be used in social media?

Speaker 1 ([08:03](#)):

Then could we do a better job of messaging in all the media that we have to reinforce the positive messages rather than the hysteria? Exactly. And you know, we target down to, you know, small groups or individuals with political ads in, in messaging, which all right, whatever you feel about political. But this is actually something that could make an impact in, in saving people's lives. So why can't we target messages down to that level and test those out and do different things. So obviously that's, that's a big piece. Something else behavioral science could do would be to change the habit, right? Help us understand how we can change those and not so get out of that thinking that you talked about earlier. This trivial thing of when I go to the bathroom I wash my hands. But that's it. How about washing your hands in a whole variety of other situations?

Speaker 1 ([08:52](#)):

Yeah, and behavioral science could help with then statements, right? So when then statements are these things where when I sneeze I will now go and wash my hands. And by just making that statement, setting up that when then statement a sets an intention and, and we are more likely to follow through on the behavior. It's not usually enough in itself, but you're, you're more likely to follow through. It's better than, nothing is better than just not thinking about it all because all of a sudden it triggers a cue, right? It's a cue in your, in your brain that says, Oh, I sneezed. Oh yes, I'm supposed to wash my hands now. And you could use temptation bundling because everybody loves the ABC song so much. So the

only time you get to sing the ABC song is when you wash your hand was the last time you got to sing the ABCs.

Speaker 1 ([09:40](#)):

I don't know if that's actually temptation bundling tip, but that's okay. That's, that's okay. But, but we could use setting up cues and triggers around our house and you, so I know that there were a couple of different times, right, that, uh, uh, the experts want us to wash our hands, which is after you sneeze of course, before you eat or handle food, uh, maybe when you get home right before playing with the kids. So can you set up and maybe write post it notes, put them around the house or do other ways of, of reminding yourself, setting up those, uh, when, then statements, but then also having reminders and triggers. And then lastly, let's change the social norm. Let's actually make it socially normal to wash your hands. That, that when someone sneezes in a meeting, it's the norm for that person to get up and go and wash their hands.

Speaker 1 ([10:34](#)):

So it's not like, Oh man, that gee, she's getting up to wash her hands and that's going to totally disrupt our meeting. Right. It's going to be, Oh my gosh, she sneezed and she didn't get up and go out. Oh my God, what's wrong with her? It's, you know what got me to wash my hands a lot more than probably anything else before this whole thing has been, was it me? No, it was a Seinfeld episode where Seinfeld was, they were in the restaurant, uh, and the, the, the chef went to the bathroom and then didn't wash his hands and went out and cooked and then Seinfeld and wouldn't eat at that restaurant anymore. And he wouldn't shake his hand because he kept having this image of him not washing his hands after being in the, in the bathroom. So Jerry's hypochondria had a positive influence on you.

Speaker 1 ([11:17](#)):

It was interesting, but that was it. And TV shows can help set social norms and, and those kinds of things. And so I think we need to start setting that social norm differently. And he, you know, even from the perspective of, all right, washing your hands, but are you washing your hands long enough or are you actually singing the ABC song for that 20 seconds? Do you see somebody put their hands into the water, wash them, rinse them off and go and you just go, that's not washing your hands. You gotta wash your hands, dude. Hey dude, what's going on? Right. You know, I'll set a 22nd timer, which by the way, I think people should try to set a 22nd timer when they wash their hands, just to see how hard that really is. So should we bring 22nd timers into public restrooms? And then as the person in front of you starts that you start the timer just to just to cue them.

Speaker 1 ([12:03](#)):

That is a great idea. We should do that. All right, so let's wrap this up. Yeah. Okay. Quick recap here with the potential pandemic that could happen. We should all be washing our hands more yet we aren't doing it now. Behavioral science to point to some really, really key reasons why we don't, right? The first thing is that we're not convinced of the need or the effectiveness of hand washing when it comes to preventing the spread of disease and hand-washing seems to be just too commonplace and trivial to really have a big impact. So we discounted second friction man. There is so often friction that gets us, that keeps us from getting to the sink or the hand sanitizer. Right? Third, we don't have the habit to wash as much as we should. It's just a after we use the bathroom and not in all the other environments that we really should be doing it and forth and this is the last one.

Speaker 1 ([12:52](#)):

We are emotionally drained by how overwhelming this whole thing can appear. So we just wonder if we could really make a difference. Right? So all of that may sound like a downer. It's a huge downer. But behavioral science also has some insights that can help. First, we need to do a better job at communicating personalizing messages that drive the greatest behavior change. So from a policy and a public information piece, that's a key piece. Second, we need to change our habits about washing our hands. One way we can do this better is to set up when then statements. Like when I get home, I will wash my hands. These cues help us remember and keep the idea top of mind. Third, we can make washing hands more visual and more of a social norm. If people feel like they are being watched and it's the norm to wash, they're more likely to wash their hands. Okay, so that wraps up this week's episode of weekly grooves. We hope that it was informative and that you've learned something. Please take a moment to let us know how you feel about this podcast as we're just getting going, you can contact us on Twitter at what motivates or at T hula hat. Now go wash your hands. Go wash your hands right now after that's a, maybe it's a Q right after you listen to weekly grooves, go wash your hands every week. All right, so go wash your hands and have a great week.

Speaker 2 ([14:11](#)):

[Weekly Grooves Outro Music].