

# DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CLEANING, DISINFECTING AND STERILISING

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, one may come across the words [cleaning](#), [disinfecting](#), and [sterilising](#) often. Though these words are used interchangeably, they are not the same.

Cleaning is the removal of any visible particle, ranging from dust to fallen food. It usually involves using soap, detergent or enzymatic products and water to remove germs from surfaces. It does not necessarily kill germs, but removes them. Cleaning lowers the number of germs and the risk of spreading infection. Cleaning is also the first step to disinfection and sterilisation.

Unlike cleaning, disinfecting kills germs on surfaces or objects with the use of chemicals. It does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs. Killing germs on a surface after cleaning can further lower the risk of spreading infection. Some common areas that have to be disinfected are doorknobs, light switches, counter tops, tables, handles, taps, toilets, and electronic devices.

Sterilisation destroys all the microorganisms on a surface or in a fluid. This prevents disease transmission associated with the use of that item. It is achieved through various means including heat, chemicals, irradiation, high pressure, and filtration. Sterilisation is especially important for hospitals, where surgeries take place.

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There are a lot of scientific terms being bandied about during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here's a short primer on the key aspects everyone should be

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