Five Risk Factors for Foodborne Illness and How to Prevent

The five most common food-handling mistakes, or risk factors, that can cause a foodborne illness:

1. Purchasing food from unsafe sources.
2. Failing to cook food correctly.
3. Holding food at incorrect temperatures.
4. Using contaminated equipment.
5. Practicing poor personal hygiene.

Purchasing food from unsafe sources can be a big problem. Therefore, purchasing food from approved, reputable suppliers is critical.

Other food handling mistakes listed are related to the four main practices. These include:

- **Time-Temperature Abuse**
  ◦ Food has suffered when it stays too long at temperatures that are good for growth of pathogens.
    ▪ Food is not held or stored at the correct temperatures.
    ▪ Food is not cooked or reheated enough to kill pathogens.
    ▪ Food is not cooled correctly.
- **Cross-Contamination**
  ◦ Pathogens can be transferred from one surface or food to another.
    ▪ Ready-to-eat food touches contaminated surfaces.
    ▪ Contaminated ingredients are added to food that receives no further cooking.
      Contaminated food touches or drips fluids onto cooked or ready to eat food.
      Food handler touches contaminated food and then touches ready-to-eat food.
    ▪ Contaminated wiping cloths touch food-contact surfaces.
- **Poor Personal Hygiene**
  ◦ Food handlers can cause foodborne illness if they do any of these following actions:
    ▪ Fail to wash their hands correctly after using the restroom.
    ▪ Cough or sneeze on food.
    ▪ Touch or scratch wounds and then touch food.
    ▪ Work while sick.
- **Poor Cleaning and Sanitizing**
  ◦ Pathogens can spread to food if equipment hasn't been cleaned and sanitized correctly between uses.
    ▪ Equipment and utensils are not washed, rinsed, and sanitized between uses.
    ▪ Wiping cloths are not stored in a sanitizer solution between uses.
    ▪ Sanitizing solutions are not at the required levels to sanitize objects.
    ▪ Food contact surfaces are wiped clean and not washed, rinsed, and sanitized between uses.