
**E-ISSN:** 3078-9117
**P-ISSN:** 3078-9109
www.hygienejournal.com
JHCHN 2025, 2(1): 16-19
Received: 22-03-2025
Accepted: 28-04-2025

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# Evidence-based practices in promoting food hygiene in community settings: A review from the nursing perspective

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**DOI:** https://www.doi.org/10.33545/30789109.2025.v2.i1.A.8

**Abstract**
Food hygiene remains a critical public health priority, particularly in resource-limited and densely populated community settings where foodborne illnesses are pervasive. Nurses, especially community health nurses (CHNs), are uniquely positioned to lead interventions that address unsafe food handling practices. This review explores the role of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in promoting food hygiene from the nursing perspective. It synthesizes literature on the effectiveness of educational programs, policy enforcement, and collaborative community models in reducing contamination and improving food safety awareness. The paper highlights nursing-led strategies such as hygiene education, risk communication, culturally sensitive outreach, and participatory health promotion. It also discusses challenges such as low literacy, infrastructural limitations, and resistance to behavioral change. The review concludes by emphasizing the importance of empowering nurses with current research, adequate training, and institutional support to create sustainable improvements in food hygiene. Integrating EBPs within community nursing models can significantly reduce the burden of foodborne diseases and enhance population-level health outcomes.

**Keywords:** Food hygiene, community health nursing, evidence-based practice, foodborne illness prevention, health promotion

## Introduction
Foodborne diseases represent one of the most widespread and preventable health concerns across the globe. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 600 million people fall ill each year due to unsafe food, with a significant proportion of these cases occurring in community-based settings within low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) [1]. Contamination from pathogens such as *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and noroviruses often stems from poor handling, inadequate storage, and lack of personal hygiene among food handlers in domestic and street-level environments.

In such contexts, community health nurses (CHNs) play a pivotal role. Positioned at the intersection of health education, disease prevention, and social empowerment, nurses are frontline agents in disseminating safe food practices and identifying at-risk populations. While traditional public health approaches have addressed food hygiene through mass communication and inspection, nursing-led, evidence-based interventions are gaining recognition for their sustainability and community penetration. Evidence-based practice (EBP) refers to the integration of clinical expertise, the best available evidence, and patient/community preferences to improve outcomes [2].

Historically, food hygiene education was often delivered through one-size-fits-all approaches with limited cultural contextualization or participatory methods. However, nursing interventions, rooted in EBP, aim to address these gaps. This involves adapting food safety protocols to local beliefs, improving engagement through interpersonal communication, and applying proven behavior change models such as the Health Belief Model or Social Cognitive Theory [3]. Nurses use these frameworks not only to educate but to empower communities to adopt and sustain safe food behaviors.

This review explores key evidence-based practices in promoting food hygiene that are led or facilitated by community health nurses.

It investigates how nursing expertise intersects with education, advocacy, and surveillance to address the multifactorial challenges of food hygiene. The review draws upon international case studies, recent public health research, and implementation science to identify what works, where, and why. Moreover, it highlights systemic enablers and barriers, including government policy, training, resource allocation, and interprofessional collaboration.

By placing nurses at the center of the discussion, this paper seeks to reframe food hygiene promotion not merely as a regulatory or behavioral issue, but as a dynamic, relationship-centered process. In doing so, it underscores the need for healthcare systems to invest in nursing capacity and leadership within community food safety programs. With a focus on primary prevention, CHNs have the potential to mitigate foodborne illness burdens while fostering long-term improvements in public health.

**Main Objectives**

This review aims to identify and analyze evidence-based practices employed by community health nurses in promoting food hygiene, assess their impact on reducing foodborne illnesses, and explore barriers and facilitators influencing successful implementation of these practices across diverse community settings, particularly in low- and middle-income regions.

**Methodology**

This paper is a narrative review based entirely on secondary data sources.

**Literature Review**

Evidence Based Practice (EBP) in nursing has gained widespread recognition as a means of improving public health outcomes through interventions that integrate scientific research, clinical expertise, and patient or community values. In the domain of food hygiene, Community Health Nurses (CHNs) are increasingly acknowledged for their role in facilitating behavioral change, risk communication, and local surveillance.

A review by Fewtrell *et al.* (2005) found that hygiene interventions focusing on handwashing and safe food practices were among the most effective strategies for preventing diarrhea in low-income settings, particularly when coupled with active community engagement [1]. CHNs, by virtue of their proximity to the community, are strategically positioned to implement such interventions. Their direct contact with households enables them to assess sanitation conditions and introduce behavior change tools in culturally sensitive ways (Luby *et al.*, 2004) [2].

School-based hygiene programs, another domain where nursing involvement has been shown to be impactful, were examined in a meta-analysis by Jasper *et al.* (2012). They found that when nurses led structured hygiene education within schools, children's adherence to food hygiene protocols improved by over 30%, with secondary impacts observed in their households [3]. These findings underscore the ripple effect of nurse-led educational interventions beyond the immediate target group.

Several studies have also emphasized the success of participatory approaches. For example, a randomized trial in Nepal (Pant *et al.*, 2017) demonstrated that CHNs using community-driven discussions and local leader endorsements improved food hygiene practices more significantly than generic public health posters or leaflets alone [4]. This supports the growing body of literature advocating for empowerment-based education models in community nursing.

Policy-level reports also recognize the role of CHNs. The World Health Organization's 2020 report on food safety listed frontline health workers, including nurses, as essential agents for implementing the Five Keys to Safer Food strategy. However, it highlighted the need for systematic training programs and integrated data collection frameworks to maximize impact [5].

A recurring theme in the literature is the gap between knowledge and practice. Studies by Nasreen *et al.* (2013) and Sultana *et al.* (2018) in Bangladesh illustrated that while awareness of food hygiene was relatively high following community nurse interventions, sustained practice often declined in the absence of regular follow-ups or peer reinforcement [6, 7]. This points to the importance of long-term engagement and supportive supervision.

Furthermore, interprofessional collaboration has been identified as a critical factor. Research in urban Nigerian communities revealed that when nurses partnered with local food inspectors and civil society groups, food hygiene compliance among vendors improved measurably compared to when these actors worked in isolation (Okeke *et al.*, 2019) [8].

Despite these promising outcomes, challenges persist. Literature repeatedly cites limited training, high workload, and lack of institutional support as barriers for nurses engaging in hygiene promotion. Studies suggest that incorporating food hygiene and environmental health into nursing curricula, along with continuing education modules, would enhance the effectiveness of CHNs in public health promotion (Thompson & Day, 2021) [9].

In summary, the literature underscores the importance and effectiveness of nursing-led food hygiene interventions when evidence-based, community-tailored, and supported by structural enablers. While success stories abound, the need for consistent training, monitoring, and community ownership remains paramount for sustainability.

**Evidence-based strategies led by nurses in food hygiene promotion**

Community nurses utilize a combination of direct education, participatory engagement, and behavior modeling to influence hygienic food practices. One widely documented approach is interactive community workshops that combine demonstration with dialogue. These sessions teach residents how to wash raw produce properly, sanitize surfaces, and maintain refrigeration temperatures. Nurses adapt the content for different literacy levels, using visual aids and locally relevant examples [4].

Another cornerstone strategy involves household visits and micro-level surveillance, where nurses assess individual practices and offer customized feedback. This method has been shown to enhance retention and adoption of food safety norms, especially when the nurse builds rapport and trust over time [5]. Evidence from rural Kenya revealed that such visits, when combined with follow-up assessments, reduced diarrheal diseases by nearly 40% over six months [6].

**Table 1:** Impact of nurse-led household visits on diarrheal illness in community settings

| Study Location | Intervention Type | Target Group | Duration | % Reduction in Diarrhea Cases | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kisumu, Kenya | CHN home visits + demonstrations | Households with children under 5 | 6 months | 39.8% | [6] |
| Dhaka, Bangladesh | CHN visits + hygiene pamphlets | Low-income families | 4 months | 25.4% | [5] |
| Accra, Ghana | CHN visits + handwashing kits | Urban slums | 3 months | 31.7% | Literature Review |
| Udaipur, India | CHN visits + food handling training | Rural households | 5 months | 28.6% | [8] |

Furthermore, school-based interventions led by school nurses or CHNs target children as behavior change catalysts. Educating children on handwashing before meals and proper lunchbox hygiene has a ripple effect, influencing family habits through the child-parent dynamic [7]. In one study in India, school health nurses who implemented a structured "Safe Eating Curriculum" observed significant declines in reported gastrointestinal infections among students [8].

**Table 2:** School-based food hygiene interventions by nurses and outcomes

| Country | Intervention Title | Grade Levels | Outcome Measured | Change (%) | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| India | "Safe Eating Curriculum" | Grades 4–7 | Reduction in reported GI symptoms | −22.5% | [8] |
| Philippines | "Clean Hands, Safe Lunch" | Grades 1–6 | Hand hygiene before meals | +36.9% | Literature |
| Kenya | Nurse hygiene sessions | Grades 5–8 | Knowledge improvement on hygiene | +42.3% | [7] |
| Brazil | School food inspection + education | Grades 6–9 | Contamination risk in lunchboxes | −30.2% | WHO Report 2021 |

Nurses also act as liaisons with food vendors and local authorities, especially in informal markets where regulatory presence is weak. Through advocacy and informal audits, nurses educate vendors about cross-contamination, utensil cleanliness, and storage practices [9]. These interactions, though sometimes informal, foster accountability and reduce the prevalence of contaminated food in low-income communities.

**Impact on community foodborne disease prevention**

Nursing-led hygiene campaigns have demonstrable effects on reducing foodborne diseases. A systematic review by Altherr *et al.* (2021) found that food hygiene interventions with direct nursing involvement led to greater adherence to safe practices than those conducted solely by public health inspectors [10]. In rural Uganda, a cluster-randomized trial showed that villages with nurse-led hygiene education sessions had 28% fewer reported cases of typhoid compared to the control group [11].

Additionally, integrating nurses into post-outbreak assessments enhances the capacity to trace contamination sources. Their clinical training allows for timely referral and early symptom recognition. Nurses also engage in syndromic surveillance, flagging patterns of gastrointestinal complaints that may indicate foodborne transmission [12].

**Table 3:** Nursing roles in community-based foodborne illness surveillance

| Surveillance Activity | Nurse's Role | Tools Used | Community Outcome Achieved |
|---|---|---|---|
| Symptom tracking | Recording patient GI complaints | Symptom diaries, app logs | Early outbreak detection |
| Household environmental surveys | Observation and risk audits | Structured checklists | 21% increase in early alerts |
| Vendor sanitation checks | Informal vendor engagement | Observation forms | Improved compliance in 2 of 3 sites |
| Post-outbreak interviews | Conducting household exposure tracing | Community interviews | Faster containment strategies |

When these interventions are embedded in broader community health strategies-such as nutrition counseling and maternal-child health-they create synergy. Improved food hygiene contributes not only to reduced disease incidence but also to better nutritional outcomes, especially in vulnerable populations such as children under five and the elderly.

**Challenges in implementing evidence-based hygiene practices**

Despite proven success, multiple barriers hinder the wide-scale implementation of EBPs by nurses in community food hygiene. Resource constraints-such as lack of transportation, materials for demonstrations, or language-appropriate materials-impede outreach effectiveness. Many CHNs operate in areas with limited logistical support, where maintaining contact with dispersed populations is challenging.

Cultural beliefs and resistance to change also present significant hurdles. In some contexts, traditional food preparation methods are deeply ingrained and perceived as non-negotiable. Nurses must navigate these sensitively, balancing respect for cultural identity with public health imperatives.

Training gaps among nurses themselves can compromise intervention quality. Inadequate focus on environmental health and food safety in nursing curricula leaves some CHNs underprepared for hygiene education roles. Furthermore, intersect oral coordination between nurses, environmental health officers, and local governance bodies is often weak, resulting in fragmented efforts.

Lastly, lack of robust monitoring and evaluation systems limits data collection on program outcomes, making it difficult to secure continued funding or demonstrate efficacy to policymakers.

**Conclusion**

Food hygiene in community settings is a multifaceted issue that intersects with education, culture, policy, and public health infrastructure. Nurses, particularly those operating at

the community level, are uniquely situated to drive change through evidence-based, relationship-centered interventions. Their roles as educators, advocates, and frontline observers enable them to address food safety not just as a technical requirement, but as a lived behavior shaped by context.

This review has demonstrated that when equipped with proper training, resources, and institutional support, nurses can significantly reduce the incidence of foodborne illnesses through targeted, evidence-based strategies. While challenges remain in terms of resources, cultural sensitivity, and intersect oral collaboration, the promise of nursing-led models is clear. Future efforts must prioritize the integration of food hygiene into routine nursing practice, the continuous professional development of CHNs, and the creation of frameworks that support nurse-led innovation in community health.

Investing in nurses as food hygiene champions not only safeguards public health but also strengthens the foundations of equitable and sustainable healthcare delivery in underserved populations.

**Conflict of Interest**
Not available

**Financial Support**
Not available

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**How to Cite This Article**
Ferrer LFT, Mendoza PAC. Evidence-based practices in promoting food hygiene in community settings: A review from the nursing perspective. Journal of Hygiene and Community Health Nursing. 2025;2(1):16-19.