

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless and tasteless gas produced by incomplete combustion of fossil fuels such as wood, gas, oil or coal. Sources of CO at home include furnaces, water heaters, clothes dryers, wood stoves, ovens, motor vehicle exhaust, lawn mowers, generators and other appliances that operate by burning fuel.

Why is CO a concern?

CO is a health concern because when you breathe CO it affects the red blood cells ability to carry oxygen and blocks the absorption of oxygen into the bloodstream. The brain is extremely sensitive to oxygen starvation. Because you cannot see, smell or taste CO, poisoning can happen to anyone, anytime, anywhere.

What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

Low concentrations – tiredness, headaches, nausea, dizziness, shortness of breath on exertion.

Longer exposure time or higher concentrations – severe headache, mental confusion, impaired vision and hearing, loss of strength and muscle control, collapse on exertion.

Extreme concentrations – unconsciousness, coma, death. If you experience any of the symptoms of CO, **leave the home and move into fresh air as quickly as possible**. Seek medical attention immediately if anyone shows symptoms of CO poisoning. Older persons, children, people with heart or respiratory conditions, and pets may be particularly sensitive to CO and may feel the effects more quickly.

How can I protect myself?

There are a number of ways to protect yourself and your family from CO poisoning:

Carbon monoxide detectors – The best way to recognize the presence of CO in your home before a serious situation develops is to have a CO detector in any work area that may present a hazard and outside sleeping areas. There are several types of CO detectors available to purchase. The Carbon Monoxide Safety Association recommends only CO detectors bearing the CSA International CAN/CGA 6.19 or the Underwriters' Laboratories (UL) 2034 standard. Follow the manufacturer's instructions to install and routinely test the detector to ensure proper functioning.

Annual inspections and service – Have a qualified service technician inspect and clean all fuel-burning appliances, venting systems and chimneys.

Operate outdoor appliances safely – Do not operate charcoal or propane BBQ's, portable camp stoves, gas generators, or other gas-powered appliances indoors. Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked inside of a closed garage, always have the garage door open to let fresh air in. Always keep the doors connecting the garage to the house closed if your automobile is running. Never run a motor vehicle, generator, pressure washer or any gas-powered engine outside of an open window where exhaust can vent into an enclosed space.

What should I do if the CO detector alarm sounds?

If a CO detector alarm sounds in your home, open all doors and windows to ventilate. If the alarm continues, stay out of your home and contact the local gas utility or a qualified heating contractor to check your fuel-burning appliances.

Reference: modified with permission from Middlesex – London Health Unit



For more information, please call the
Health ACTION Line at **1-800-660-5853**
or visit our website at **www.healthunit.org**