

Information Sheet

CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING...THE LEADING CAUSE OF POISONING DEATHS IN THE USA

What is Carbon Monoxide?

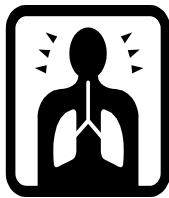
Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, tasteless, non-irritating gas produced by burning any fuel. Common sources include:



- Oil and gas-powered furnaces
- Other gas appliances (stoves, water heaters, etc.)
- Kerosene or propane space heaters
- Automobile engines
- Boat engines
- Generators
- Charcoal or gas grills
- Lawnmowers and other gas-powered tools
- Wood stoves and other open fires

How does Carbon Monoxide make you sick?

When we breathe oxygen into our lungs, it binds to our red blood cells, which then carry the oxygen to all parts of our body. When we breathe carbon monoxide, it binds to red blood cells so strongly that the cells cannot carry any oxygen.



Exposure to high levels of CO starves our body of oxygen, which may lead to **headache, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, dizziness, weakness, confusion, convulsions, loss of consciousness, and death**. Very high concentrations of CO can cause loss of consciousness *in only a few breaths*. A person who survives CO poisoning may suffer permanent damage to the brain or other organs.

How can I prevent CO poisoning?

- Any appliance or engine that burns fuel should *never* be used inside an enclosed, poorly-ventilated space. It is dangerous, for example, to cook over a gas grill inside your house, to operate a generator in a closed room, or to leave your car running inside a closed garage.
- Gas and oil furnaces should be professionally cleaned and checked annually for leaks or worn parts.
- Healthy ducts and chimneys whisk CO away from your furnace, woodstove, and fireplaces. But they can become blocked or develop leaks over time, allowing CO to build up inside your house; they should be checked and cleaned by a professional once each year.

- Beware of automobile or boat engine exhaust. Fumes can leak through faulty exhaust systems into passenger areas. Fumes can also “pool” in areas where air circulation is poor, such as in the bed of a truck with a camper shell or behind the deck of a slow-moving boat. *Never swim near the exhaust system of a boat when the engine is running.*
- Do not use your gas oven or range to heat your home.
- Install CO detectors in your home or on your boat and take every alarm seriously. Teach your family to respond to the alarm just as if it were a fire alarm.



A Silent Killer

Since you cannot smell, see, or taste carbon monoxide, you may not be aware that you are breathing it until symptoms develop. The earliest symptoms are often headache, nausea, vomiting, or drowsiness, which can be easily confused with symptoms of other conditions such as the flu, motion sickness, and alcohol poisoning. ***If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, immediately move all people and pets to fresh air and call for medical help.***

Experts at the Blue Ridge Poison Center are available anytime you have concerns about carbon monoxide. Call 1-800-222-1222. Cell users call 1-800-451-1428.