

Carbon Monoxide - CO

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare
Division of Health
Bureau of Community and Environmental Health
Indoor Environment Program

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, tasteless, non-irritating gas produced whenever fuel such as wood, charcoal, gasoline, oil, kerosene, propane, or natural gas is not burned properly. CO exposure is



responsible for more deadly accidental poisonings in the United States than any other agent, with the highest numbers during the winter. Sources of CO include: unvented



kerosene, propane, and gas space heaters, leaking chimneys and furnaces, back-drafting or spills from furnaces, gas water heaters, wood stoves, and fireplaces, gas ovens and ranges, and car exhaust. Tobacco smoke, including

secondhand smoke, is also a source of CO exposure in homes where people smoke inside. Each year around 200 people are killed by accidental CO poisoning and another 5,000 people are injured.

CO Poisoning and Your Family's Health

Anyone can be at risk for CO exposure but babies, little children, unborn babies, pregnant women, the elderly and people with heart or lung disease, or anemia are more sensitive to it. CO enters the body through the mouth and nose as a person breaths.

Mild exposure symptoms may seem like the flu and include: headache and weakness, dizziness, sleepiness, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, nausea and/or vomiting.

High or prolonged exposures to CO can cause: confusion, loss of muscle control, blurred vision, extreme headache and weakness, fainting, convulsions, and death.

When CO Poisoning is Suspected

- Move the victim to fresh air immediately.
- Open doors and windows to let fresh air in.
- Turn off appliances and leave the house.
- Go to the Emergency Room of a local hospital and tell the doctor you suspect CO poisoning. The victim should not drive.

Protect Yourself From CO Poisoning

DO

- Do consider buying and installing a CO detector that meets *Underwriters Laboratories (UL) standard 2034-95*, if your house has fuel-burning appliances. Carefully follow the manufacturer's instructions for where to put the appliance, use, and maintenance.
- Do have a qualified technician inspect, clean, and adjust your wood and gas appliances and chimneys/vents every fall, before the start of home heating season.
- Do purchase gas appliances that vent their fumes to the outside-whenever possible. Have them installed by a trained professional.
- Do read and follow all of the instructions that come with any fuel-burning device.
- Do crack windows in homes, campers, motor homes, and boat cabins when using unvented, fuel-burning appliances.
- Do make sure that your car, truck, and/or motor home has a functional, tight exhaust system. Repair exhaust leaks promptly.
- Do pay attention to symptoms, particularly if more than one person is feeling them. Remember that exposure symptoms can seem like the flu.
- Do avoid hard physical activity during peak traffic hours, in busy traffic areas, and during inversions.

DON'T

- Don't ever cook or heat with charcoal grills indoors - even in a fireplace.
- Don't idle vehicles in the garage - even if the door is open. CO can accumulate quickly and enter your home.
- Don't sit in a parked vehicle with the engine running and the windows closed.
- Don't use any gasoline-powered engines (mowers, trimmers, snow blowers, chain saws) or tools (welders, pumps, compressors, generators, high pressure washers, concrete cutting saws) in buildings or semi-enclosed spaces.
- Don't use gas stoves or ovens to heat your home.
- Don't sleep in any room with an unvented gas- or kerosene-burning space heater.
- Don't close the damper to the fireplace unless the fire is completely out and the coals are cold.
- Don't ride in covered pickup truck beds (campers, canopies). Air turbulence around the moving vehicle can draw exhaust in.



For More Information

Contact the Idaho Indoor Environment Program at 800-445-8647 or the IAQ Information Clearinghouse at 800-438-4318.



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & WELFARE