

Poison Prevention Press

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Common Carbon Monoxide Sources

- Gas and oil furnaces
- Portable generators and heaters
- Gas and oil water hot water heaters
- Cars, trucks, and vans
- Gas stoves
- Gas clothes dryers
- Fireplaces and wood stoves
- Gas and charcoal grills
- Lawnmowers, trimmers, and leaf blowers
- Some paint strippers
- House and structure fires
- Permanent generators

Did you know that...

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 430 people in the U.S. die from accidental CO poisoning each year?
- According to the CDC, more than 5,000 people visit the emergency department for a CO poisoning each year?

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Carbon Monoxide

January is the deadliest month for carbon monoxide (CO) poisonings. Although they can happen year-round, CO poisonings occur more often during the winter months, as colder temperatures cause people to use furnaces and other heaters. CO is a colorless, odorless, and poisonous gas that is often called a “silent killer” -- a scary, but appropriate name considering the dangers the gas can pose to you and your loved ones. Everyone is at risk for CO poisoning.

Where Does CO Come From?

CO is produced by the incomplete burning of fuel. Some fuels that produce CO include natural gas, gasoline, kerosene, oil, wood, and charcoal.

Why is CO Dangerous?

When CO is breathed in, the body’s red blood cells pick it up faster than oxygen. This means the body does not get the amount of oxygen that it needs to function properly. If a person breathes in CO for a long period of time or at a high concentration, it can kill them.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of CO Poisoning?

The symptoms of CO poisoning are very similar to the flu. Some effects can be delayed and last a long time. Mild and moderate exposures can cause:

- Dizziness
- Tiredness
- Confusion
- Headache
- Vomiting
- Increased heart rate

Severe exposures can cause:

- Seizures
- Brain damage
- Heart and lung failure
- Coma
- Death

How is CO Poisoning Treated?

Oxygen is the first line treatment for CO poisoning. If you or someone you know has been exposed to CO, call the poison center.

Should I Install CO Alarms in My Home?

Yes. Install at least one CO alarm on every level of your home, if possible. If you only have one alarm, place it near bedrooms so people can hear it if they’re asleep. Alarms should be placed at least 15 feet away from cooking or heating appliances, and on the wall or ceiling. Alarms need to be replaced after a few years. Check your specific alarm for the exact length of time.

If you think that you or someone else has been exposed to CO, remove all people and pets from the area. Turn off the suspected source, if possible. Have the appliance or suspected source inspected before using it again. Call the Maryland Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222. More detailed information on CO can be found on our blog– blog.mdpoison.com.