

Carbon Monoxide

(CO)

What is carbon monoxide (CO)?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas that when breathed in interferes with the normal uptake of oxygen into the blood stream. In higher concentrations it can quickly prove fatal. In lower concentrations it can lead to a variety of health issues. In the United States hundreds of people each year die from CO poisoning.

How might carbon monoxide get into my home?

Carbon monoxide is created when any fossil fuel (oil, gasoline, kerosene, natural gas) burns. When wood burns - in a wood stove or a fireplace - it also produces carbon monoxide. CO is usually associated with space heaters and other alternate sources of home heat. It may be produced in larger amounts when there isn't enough oxygen available for efficient burning.

What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

The most obvious is the loss of consciousness, or even death. However, the most common symptoms are headache, dizziness, weakness, general (unexplained) fatigue, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and mental confusion.

How can I avoid CO poisoning?

Make sure that all heating units in your home are checked each year by a certified professional to see that they are in good working order. Also, make sure that there is proper ventilation in any room in which a space heater is being used. Also:

- Never use your gas stove/range to heat your home
- Never use a charcoal grill in your home
- Never allow a generator (or any gas powered device) to run in your home, to include your basement
- Avoid allowing your car to run for any length of time if your home has an attached garage

How is it diagnosed and treated?

If you believe you or a child may be suffering from CO poisoning, see a physician immediately. At times, symptoms of CO poisoning can be confused with symptoms of seasonal influenza.

Is CO poisoning life-threatening?

CO poisoning can be fatal and it can have lasting health affects.

How can I know if there is CO in my home?

CO detectors are sold at most hardware stores. You can check the flame in a home furnace; it should burn blue, not orange or yellow. A smoky smell may mean your appliance isn't venting correctly. A heating professional should be able to evaluate your situation.