

FACTS ABOUT CARBON MONOXIDE (CO)

What is carbon monoxide?

You can't see, taste or smell carbon monoxide, but it is produced whenever any fuel (such as wood, charcoal, gasoline, oil, kerosene, propane, or natural gas) is burned. Furnaces, fireplaces, water heaters and other heat producing items that use fuel or wood must be vented and working properly in order to prevent the build up of carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide exposure is responsible for more poisoning deaths in the United States than anything else.

Where does carbon monoxide come from?

Sources of carbon monoxide include un-vented kerosene, propane, and gas space heaters, leaking chimneys and vents, broken furnaces, gas water heaters, wood stoves, fireplaces, gas ovens/ranges and gas clothes dryers. Car and boat exhaust fumes are also sources.

How can carbon monoxide poisoning affect my health?

Exposure to carbon monoxide can be deadly. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that hundreds of people per year are killed by accidental carbon monoxide poisoning and thousands of people get sick from it.

Carbon monoxide is dangerous because it blocks your body from absorbing the oxygen it needs. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning vary based on the amount that a person is exposed to, the length of time, and the

general health and age of the person. Mild exposure symptoms may seem like the flu and include: mild headache and weakness, dizziness, sleepiness, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, nausea and/or vomiting. High levels of carbon monoxide or exposure that lasts a long time can cause confusion, loss of muscle control, blurred vision, extreme headache, weakness, fainting, convulsions and even death.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone can be at risk for carbon monoxide exposure. However, the following people get sick the easiest:

- infants and young children
- pregnant women and their unborn children
- the elderly
- people with heart disease, lung disease, or anemia

What should you do if carbon monoxide poisoning is suspected?

- Move the victim outside to fresh air immediately.
- Go directly to the emergency room or call 911 and tell them that you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning. If you are the one that is sick, you should not drive. Call 911 immediately.

If carbon monoxide poisoning has occurred, it can usually be found by a simple blood test done at the hospital soon after exposure.

What steps can be taken to reduce exposure and protect yourself from carbon monoxide poisoning?

- **DO** purchase and install a carbon monoxide detector that meets Underwriters Laboratories (UL) standard 2034-95. Carefully follow the manufacturer's instructions for proper placement, use and maintenance.
- **DO** have a heating professional inspect, clean, and adjust your fireplace, wood stove, 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. Have them installed by a heating professional.
- **DO** read and follow all of the instructions that accompany any fuel-burning devices.
- **DO** make sure that your car, truck, motor home and/or boat has a working, airtight exhaust system. Repair exhaust leaks immediately.
- **DO** pay attention to symptoms (headache, dizziness, tiredness and/or a sick feeling in your stomach), especially if more than one person is feeling sick.
- **DO NOT** ever cook or heat with a grill indoors—even if you put it inside a fireplace.
- **DO NOT** run vehicles in the garage—even if the door is open. Carbon monoxide can accumulate quickly and enter your home.
- **DO NOT** sit in a parked vehicle with the engine running for a long period of time.
- **DO NOT** use fuel-powered machines (mowers, trimmers, snow blowers, chain saws) or tools (welders, pumps, compressors, generators, high pressure washers, concrete cutting saws) in buildings or semi-enclosed spaces.
- **DO NOT** use gas stoves or ovens to heat your home.
- **DO NOT** use an un-vented gas or kerosene space heater.
- **DO NOT** close the damper to the fireplace unless the fire is completely out and the coals are cold.
- **DO NOT** ride in covered pickup truck beds (campers, caps/toppers). Air moving around the vehicle can draw exhaust in.

For additional information, please contact the Michigan Department of Community Health at (517) 335-8350 or (800) 648-6942.