Camping and Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

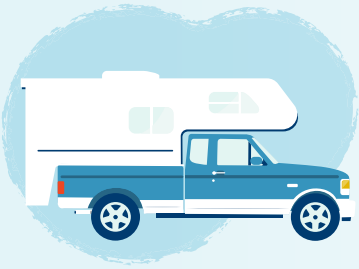
Camping is a favorite pastime for many Michiganders at places like parks to music festivals to wilderness areas. Camping often involves burning carbon-based fuels, like wood, gasoline and charcoal, which forms carbon monoxide (CO), a poisonous gas. **You cannot see, taste or smell CO, but it can be deadly when you breathe it in.** CO can build up in enclosed and partially enclosed areas, like tents, canopies, campers, RVs and trailers, leading to CO poisoning. Learn how to prevent CO poisoning while camping.

CO is found where fuel is burned.

Common fuel-burning camping appliances and equipment include:

- Vehicles including cars, trucks and RVs.
- Portable generators.
- Portable heaters.
- Campfires.
- Camping stoves.
- Grills.
- Lanterns.
- Range stoves.

Be Aware.

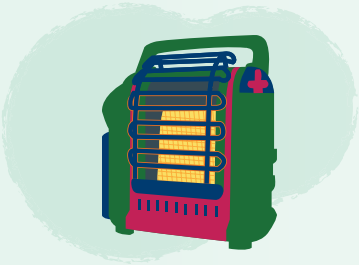


Be cautious of vehicle exhaust.

- Never run or idle a fuel-burning vehicle near an enclosed or partially enclosed space.
- Never sit in a parked vehicle with the engine running for a long period of time.
- When your car is running and your liftgate is open, CO is being pulled in. It's best to turn the vehicle off.

For RV, camper or trailer camping:

- Have fuel-burning vehicles inspected at least once a year.
- Repair exhaust leaks right away. CO can build up inside vehicles from leaks.
- While a fuel-burning vehicle is running, stay out of campers and RVs that sit on top of or are pulled by the vehicle. Exhaust containing CO can be drawn inside.



Maintain fuel-burning devices.

- Make sure fuel-burning appliances and equipment are inspected every year and are in good condition.

For RV, camper and trailer camping:

- Have heating systems and fuel-burning appliances and equipment designed for indoor-use in campers and RVs inspected by a professional every year to make sure these items are working correctly and vented properly.

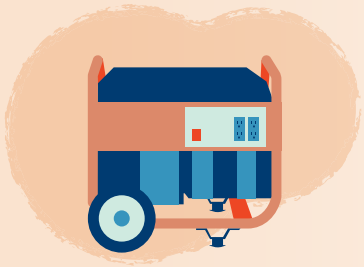
Use fuel-burning devices the correct way ...

- Read and follow all fuel-burning appliance and equipment instructions.
- Never use fuel-burning appliances and equipment inside that are intended for outdoor use, including lanterns, space heaters and grills.
- Never cook or heat with a camp stove or a gas or charcoal grill inside an enclosed or partially enclosed space.

- Remember CO can build up and linger for hours, even when fuel-burning equipment and appliances have been shut off.

For RV, camper or trailer camping:

- Make sure vents are cleared of debris.
- Never use range burners to heat your RV, camper or trailer.



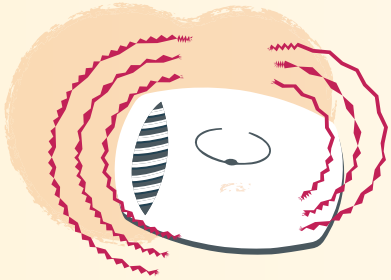
... including portable generators.

- Run portable generators **at least 20 feet away** from people and enclosed or partially enclosed spaces, like tents, canopies, vehicles. If needed, use an extra-long extension cord with your generator.

Use caution with campfires.

- Keep campfires far from enclosed or partially enclosed spaces.
- Never leave a campfire unattended or lit while sleeping.

Stay Prepared.



Install CO detectors.

- Always bring a battery-operated CO detector with you when camping. **CO detectors are the only way to alert you of CO.**
- Place the CO detector near enough so that an alarm would wake you if you are sleeping.
- Test the CO detector before camping.
- Bring extra batteries.
- Replace alkaline batteries twice a year. An easy way to remember is during time changes (spring and fall).
- Replace your CO detector every five years or according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Know CO poisoning symptoms.

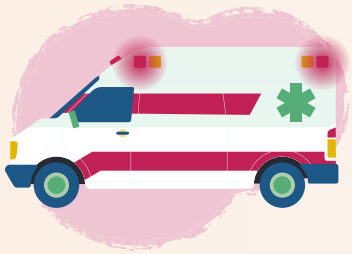
CO poisoning has flu-like symptoms, including:

- Headache.
- Dizziness.
- Nausea.
- Vomiting.
- Fatigue.
- Weakness.
- Chest tightness.
- Confusion.
- Unconsciousness.
- Coma.

Remember: People who are sleeping or intoxicated might not notice CO poisoning symptoms before it's too late.

Symptoms should not be ignored.
You could DIE within minutes if you do nothing.

Get to Fresh Air.



If you suspect CO poisoning, have symptoms or if your CO detector goes off:

1. Leave the enclosed or partially enclosed space and move to fresh air right away.
2. Call 911.
3. Stay away from the enclosed or partially enclosed space until the fire department tells you it is safe to return, even if you aren't experiencing symptoms.

CO poisoning is preventable.

Be Aware. Stay Prepared. Get to Fresh Air.

Learn more about CO poisoning.

Go to Michigan.gov/CarbonMonoxide
or scan the QR code.

MDHHS Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

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