

What is Carbon Monoxide (CO)?

You can't see, taste or smell carbon monoxide (CO). It can be deadly when you breathe it in. CO is often called the "silent killer." Carbon monoxide is a gas that forms whenever fuel is burned.

Where does CO come from?

Most CO poisonings take place at home. Sources that are not properly cared for or vented cause most CO poisonings. The most common causes of Michigan deaths are faulty furnaces and water heaters. Below are some other sources of CO:



CO in Michigan

145 people died and 3,868 people sought medical treatment for CO poisoning between 2009 and 2013 in Michigan according to numbers collected by MDHHS.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can be at risk for carbon monoxide poisoning. Those who are most at risk of harm to their health are:

- Fetuses and infants
- Pregnant women
- The elderly
- People with heart disease, lung disease, or anemia

How can CO poisoning affect your health?

CO is dangerous because it blocks your body from taking in the oxygen it needs. CO poisoning can happen suddenly or over a long period of time. CO can cause serious illness or death in just minutes.

Symptoms

Breathing in CO can cause mild symptoms that may seem like the flu or more serious symptoms such as fainting. The symptoms depend on the amount of CO a person comes in contact with, the length of time of contact, and the general health and age of the person.

Mild symptoms:

- Headache and weakness
- Dizziness
- Sleepiness
- Shortness of breath
- Tightness in the chest
- Nausea and/or vomiting

Severe symptoms:

- Confusion
- Loss of muscle control
- Blurred vision
- Extreme headache
- Weakness
- Fainting
- Convulsions



DO NOT ignore any of these symptoms! You could die within minutes if you do nothing.

What should you do if you have symptoms of CO poisoning?

- Go outside and get fresh air immediately!
- Call 911 and tell them you think you have carbon monoxide poisoning or go to the emergency room if you are able to get there without help.

A simple blood test done at the hospital can usually detect carbon monoxide poisoning.

What can you do to prevent CO poisoning?

- **DO** purchase and install carbon monoxide detectors that meet the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) standard 2034-95. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for proper placement, use and maintenance. If the detectors plug into the wall, be sure they have a battery backup.
 - **DO** leave the house if the alarm sounds on your CO detector. Go to a hospital emergency room or call 911 if anyone is feeling sick. If no one is sick, call the emergency number for your heating service or 911. Stay out of the home until your heating service or fire department says it's okay to go in.
 - **DO** have a heating professional inspect, clean, and adjust your fireplace, wood stove, gas appliances including furnaces and water heaters, and chimneys/vents every fall, before the start of home heating season.
 - **DO** purchase gas appliances that vent fumes to the outside. Have them installed by a heating professional.
 - **DO** read and follow all of the instructions for any fuel-burning devices.
 - **DO** make sure that your car, truck, 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 or if people and pets are feeling sick.
- **DON'T** run vehicles in the garage, even if the garage door is open. Carbon monoxide can build up quickly and enter your vehicle and home.
 - **DON'T** ride in covered pickup truck beds or campers. Air moving around the vehicle can draw exhaust in.
 - **DON'T** operate fuel-powered machines such as generators, power washers, or mowers in buildings or semi-enclosed spaces.
 - **DON'T** cook or heat with a grill indoors, even if you put it inside a fireplace.
 - **DON'T** sit in a parked vehicle with the engine running for a long period of time, especially if your car is in snow.
 - **DON'T** use gas stoves or ovens to heat your home.
 - **DON'T** use an un-vented gas or kerosene space heater indoors.
 - **DON'T** close the damper to the fireplace unless the fire is completely out, and the coals are cold.
 - **DON'T** swim or play near the back of a boat where the motor gives off exhaust.

