

According to the Centers for Disease Control, over 400 people die each year as a result of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning and 20,000 end up in hospital emergency rooms. CO is a gas that is both odorless and colorless and hinders the blood’s ability to deliver oxygen to the body.

The information below describes the sources of CO, its health effects and symptoms of exposure, and prevention tips to avoid CO poisoning.

SOURCES OF CARBON MONOXIDE

CO is produced by the incomplete combustion of carbon-containing fuels. Examples of such fuels include:

- Unvented space heaters burning fuel oil or gas
- Barbecues, wood stoves, or furnaces burning wood, charcoal, or natural gas
- Stoves, fireplaces, and water heaters burning natural gas
- Internal combustion engines burning natural gas

SYMPTOMS/HEALTH EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE

- CO poisoning can result in headaches, dizziness, weakness, vomiting, chest pain, confusion, loss of consciousness, nausea, and even death.
- CO poisoning can be difficult to diagnose because the symptoms often mimic the flu or other illnesses. Sleeping or intoxicated individuals can die from CO poisoning before ever experiencing symptoms.
- Fetuses, infants, the elderly, and people with heart and respiratory illnesses are at particularly high risk for CO poisoning.

TIPS ON PREVENTING CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

- Install a CO detector near sleeping areas (e.g., dorms, off-campus housing).
- Have the gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced frequently.
- Never use a charcoal grill or a BBQ indoors. All burning charcoal emits CO.
- Open flues when fireplaces are in use.
- Do not use gas ovens or gas ranges to heat living areas.
- Do not use unvented gas or kerosene space heaters in enclosed spaces.
- Do not leave a car or gas-powered equipment (e.g., emergency generator) running in any enclosed space.

What I Can Do...

- Install a CO detector near sleeping areas (e.g., dorms, off-campus housing) or on any level having an attached garage.
- Test the CO detector/alarm monthly.
- Have gas appliances checked regularly.
- **DO NOT** use gas ovens, gas ranges, or charcoal grills to heat living areas.
- **DO NOT** use unvented gas or kerosene space heaters in enclosed spaces.



CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING: WHAT TO DO

Don’t ignore symptoms, especially if more than one person is feeling them. If you think you are suffering from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning:

- Exit the area immediately and get fresh air.
- Go to an emergency room, if necessary. Be sure to tell the physician that you suspect CO poisoning.
- **DO NOT** return until area is cleared by agency/authority having jurisdiction.

REFERENCES

California Health and Safety Code, [Section 13261, Carbon Monoxide Prevention Act of 2010](#)

Centers for Disease Control, [“Carbon Monoxide \(CO\) Poisoning Prevention”](#)

National Fire Protection Association, [“Carbon Monoxide Safety”](#)

