



Carbon Monoxide Fact Sheet

What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a very dangerous gas that people cannot see, taste or smell. It is made from incomplete burning of materials such as gasoline, charcoal and wood.

Why is carbon monoxide so dangerous?

Too much CO in your blood will kill you. When a person breathes CO, it goes into the organs instead of oxygen. People literally suffocate from the inside out. Hundreds of people die each year from breathing CO.

Where does CO come from?

Kerosene or propane	Gas water heater	Charcoal grills
Space heaters	Gas clothes dryer	Fireplace/chimney
Furnaces	Gasoline-powered	
Gas oven or range top	engines	

What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

CO is sometimes called “The Great Imitator”. This is because the minor symptoms are like the flu. It is sometimes hard to tell the difference between minor CO symptoms and the flu. This is one of the reasons CO detectors are so important.

Minor Symptoms

Headache
Nausea
Vomiting
Irritability
Chest pain in heart patients
Blurred vision

Moderate Symptoms

Minor Symptoms **plus**
Drowsiness
Weakness
Dizziness
Fainting
Severe headache
Difficulty thinking

Severe Symptoms

Moderate Symptoms **plus**
Increased heart rate
Blackout spells
Permanent brain damage
Coma
Convulsions/seizure
DEATH

A person does not always notice minor symptoms. In just one night, a person can have severe symptoms or even die from CO poisoning. This is why it is very important to have CO detectors properly installed in your home.

When would I need to see a physician?

- Any person exposed to CO and has moderate or severe symptoms (see above) should see a physician right away.
- Infants and elderly adults who have been exposed to CO should see a doctor, even if they have no symptoms.
- People who have heart problems should see a doctor if they have been exposed to CO.
- Pregnant women should see a doctor right away if exposed to CO. The fetus can suffer harm even if the woman has no symptoms.

How can I protect myself from CO poisoning?

- Place a CO detector near the sleeping area.
- Never use oven or gas ranges for heating purposes.
- All fuel burning appliances, furnaces, venting and chimney systems should be checked annually by a professional. CO detectors are not a substitute for yearly checks.
- Never use fuel-burning appliances, like a barbeque grill, in a confined area such as the garage or basement.
- Never burn charcoal inside your home, cabin, recreation vehicle or tent.
- Never leave the car running in the garage. Car exhaust contains CO. It can enter the home – even if the garage door is up.

Where do I put a CO detector?

All homes should have a CO detector near the sleeping area. Other CO detectors should be put on each level of the house and near living areas. A CO detector should not be placed within 15 inches of heating or cooking appliances or in a humid area, such as the bathroom. Unlike smoke alarms, CO detectors can be placed at any height.

What do I do if a carbon monoxide detector sounds?

- Everyone should leave the house and get outside right away.
- Go to a doctor right away if anyone has had moderate or severe symptoms, has a history of heart problems, is pregnant or if an infant has been exposed.
- Call your local gas company, fire department or appliance repair shop to come and find the source of CO.
- DO NOT GO BACK INSIDE until the CO leak has been found and fixed.

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