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## Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

### What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless, gas that can cause sudden death if inhaled in large enough quantities.

### Where is CO found?

CO is found in combustion fumes, such as those produced by cars and trucks, small gasoline engines, stoves, lanterns, burning charcoal and wood, and gas ranges and heating systems. Carbon monoxide from these sources can build up in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces. People and animals in these spaces can be poisoned by breathing the carbon monoxide.

### What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

The most common symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. High levels of carbon monoxide inhalation can cause loss of consciousness and death. People who are sleeping or intoxicated can die from CO poisoning before they ever experience any symptoms.

### How does CO poisoning happen?

Red blood cells pick up carbon monoxide quicker than they pick up oxygen. If there is a lot of CO in the air, the body may replace oxygen in the blood with CO. This blocks oxygen from getting into the body, and if this goes on long enough it can damage organs and eventually result in death.

### Who is at risk for CO poisoning?

All people and animals are at risk for CO poisoning. Certain groups of people, such as

unborn babies, infants, and people with chronic heart disease, anemia, or respiratory problems, are more susceptible to carbon monoxide's effects. Each year, more than 400 Americans die from unintentional CO poisoning, more than 20,000 visit the emergency room, and more than 4,000 are hospitalized due to CO poisoning. Fatality is highest among Americans 65 and older.

### What can I do to prevent CO poisoning in my home?

- Have your heating system, water heater, and other gas, oil or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- Do not bring outdoor appliances indoors, such as gas or charcoal grills, camp stoves, generators, or portable, flameless chemical (catalytic) heaters. They can cause CO to build up inside your home, cabin, or camper.
- Never use a gas oven or range for heating. Using a gas oven or range for heating can build up CO in your home, cabin, or camper.
- Make sure generators are at least ten feet away from your home and not under any porches, wedged between buildings, or inside a garage because this can cause CO to build up, through improper ventilation, and enter your home.
- If you smell an odor from your gas refrigerator's cooling unit have an expert service it. An odor from the cooling unit of your gas refrigerator can mean you

have a defect in the cooling unit. It could also be giving off CO.

- When purchasing gas equipment, buy only equipment carrying the seal of a national testing agency, such as the American Gas Association or Underwriters' Laboratories.
- Install at least one battery-operated CO detector in your home and check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall.
- If you suspect there may be CO in your house or if your detector goes off, leave the house immediately and seek medical care if necessary.

**For more information about carbon monoxide prevention, call the New Hampshire Department of Safety, Division of Fire Safety at 603-271-3294 or visit [www.nh.gov/safety/divisions/firesafety/heatingsafety.html](http://www.nh.gov/safety/divisions/firesafety/heatingsafety.html). For more information about the health effects of carbon monoxide, contact the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services at 603-271-4496 or 1-800-852-3345 x4496 or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).**