

Carbon Monoxide

And Your Health

What Is It?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless and tasteless toxic gas. CO gas forms by burning fuels such as: propane, natural gas, gasoline, oil, coal and wood. It causes serious health effects, even death, in people and in pets. Individuals with CO poisoning are often unaware of their exposure.

How Is My Child Exposed?

CO enters the body through breathing. Common sources of CO include fuel-burning appliances and equipment. Any item that is not installed or used properly, damaged or malfunctioning, can leak CO.



Furnaces



Gas Stoves



Space Heaters



Fireplaces



Water Boilers



Generators



BBQs



Vehicles



Where?



CO builds up in homes and in poorly ventilated areas (e.g. a vehicle running in a closed garage).



Exposures are more common in cold climates during power outages and disasters, when generators and space heaters are used more, windows are closed, and ventilation may be disrupted.

How Does It Effect Health?

Most symptoms of CO poisoning are nonspecific. At low levels, flu-like symptoms last for as long as the source of exposure is present. Exposures can be new (such as from a vehicle), or over a long period (such as a cracked furnace).

Low Level Exposure

- Tiredness
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Headaches
- Weakness
- Nausea

High Level Exposure

- Chest pain
- Vision problems
- Cognitive and muscular abnormalities
- Loss of consciousness
- Convulsions
- Coma
- Death



Children breathe faster than adults. They inhale more CO due to smaller size and being closer to the ground. They have more risk of long-term problems. Unborn babies are very sensitive to CO.



Your home should have at least one **CO detector** and should meet current regulations. Install alarms in the hallways closest to where people sleep and check the battery and expiration date. Follow manufacturer instructions for testing the device and changing the batteries.

Sources

- Alberta Health Services, “Carbon Monoxide Poisoning in Children: Care Instructions”
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