

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Poisoning

Preparedness Checklist

Just like home fires, carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning can affect anyone and is dangerous. CO is an odorless, colorless gas. People are not usually aware of its' presence and can get sick or die from breathing in the poisonous gas. Carbon monoxide poisonings occur daily across the country and can happen after any emergency. CO poisonings often increase during power outages as people depend on generators and grills. But we can take action to prepare. Prepare now to protect yourself, your loved ones and your home.



What is Carbon Monoxide?

- Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas sometimes called “The Invisible Killer.”
- CO kills hundreds of people each year and injures thousands more.
- You cannot see, smell or hear it.
- You can be poisoned by a small amount of CO over a long period of time OR by a large amount of CO over a short amount of time.



Where is Carbon Monoxide Found?

CO is found in fumes produced when fuel — like gasoline or propane — is burned in appliances and equipment such as:

- Generators
- Fuel-fired room heaters
- Engine powered cars and trucks
- Small engines such as lawn equipment
- Fuel-fire lanterns
- Fuel-fire grills
- Fireplaces
- Gas ranges and stoves
- Furnaces and boilers
- Fuel-fired water heaters



What are the Symptoms of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning?

Symptoms vary based on a number of factors, including body size, breathing rate and physical condition. CO poisoning symptoms affect the most vulnerable first including children, pets, older adults, pregnant women and those with medical conditions. The initial symptoms are often described as “flu-like” and can include:

- Dizziness
- Headache
- Mental confusion
- Vomiting
- Upset stomach
- Trouble breathing
- Feeling tired

If left untreated, CO poisoning can progress into permanent organ damage and at high levels can quickly kill you. If you have been exposed to CO it is important to **get a blood test within 4 hours of the exposure.**



Home Safety

- Make sure all gas appliances are vented properly.
- Have all heating systems (including chimneys and vents) inspected and serviced annually by a professional using a portable CO detector. Inspections should check for blockages, corrosion, and disconnections.
- Never use a charcoal or gas grill inside your home, garage, vehicle, tent or semi-enclosed space like a porch.
- Never leave a car running inside a garage, even if the garage door is open.
- Do not use portable generators inside your home, basement, garage, crawlspace, shed, or in a semi-enclosed space like a porch.
- Generators, as well as any other equipment with an engine in it, should be used at least 20 feet away from your home.
- Do not use a gas range or oven to heat your home.

CO Alarms

Sense and alert you when there is a large and immediately dangerous amount of CO present.

CO Detectors

- Sense and alert when there is a small but dangerous amount of CO present.
- If people in your household are most vulnerable, you may want to consider getting a CO detector. Even a small amount of continuous CO exposure over time can be dangerous for them.
- Consider having a portable CO detector for when you travel or sleep away from home.



Prevention

- If you are alerted by either a CO alarm or detector, evacuate immediately.
- Get everyone in the household, including pets, outside immediately to your meeting place. Call 911 once you are outside. Do not go back inside until emergency responders say it is safe.
- Document your CO alarm and detectors expiration date. Over time, sensors and batteries expire and become less effective. Replace them following manufacturer guidelines.



Know the Difference

- Do not use a CO alarm in place of a smoke alarm. Have both. Smoke alarms warn you when there is smoke from a fire. CO alarms warn you when there is a dangerous level of carbon monoxide present.
- Install battery-operated or battery back-up CO alarms on every level of your home, inside bedrooms and outside sleeping areas.
- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, inside bedrooms and outside sleeping areas.
- Smoke alarms and CO alarms both make loud beeping sounds, but the sounds are different!
 - Smoke alarms typically make three fast beeps when there is smoke — **BEEP-BEEP-BEEP.**
 - A carbon monoxide alarm makes four fast beeps when there is a dangerous level of carbon monoxide — **BEEP-BEEP-BEEP-BEEP**

Prepare so you can protect.

| For more information, visit redcross.org/prepare

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