

How to Recognize and Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a deadly gas.

It can kill within minutes.

CO has no color or odor. It can only be detected with a CO detector. From 2018-2020, North Carolina Poison Control took over 1,200 calls about exposures to CO.

You can prevent CO poisoning by operating fuel-burning appliances only when there is plenty of open-air space. CO poisoning can happen when fuels like gasoline, propane, and kerosene are burned in an enclosed space or in areas without good air flow.

Dangerous examples include:



Running a generator indoors or too close to a living area



Running a car in a garage



Using a gas oven for heat



Using a charcoal grill in a garage

Mild symptoms of CO poisoning

- headache
- nausea
- vomiting
- weakness
- dizziness

Call **NC Poison Control** at **1-800-222-1222** if someone is having mild symptoms.

Major symptoms of CO poisoning

- confusion
- loss of consciousness
- seizures
- chest pain
- difficulty walking

Call **911** right away if someone has passed out or lost consciousness.

Go outside immediately if your CO detector alarms.

Call NC Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222.

Answers to Common Questions About Carbon Monoxide

How is carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning caused?

CO poisoning is caused when someone breathes in high levels of carbon monoxide in the air. CO is produced when gasoline, wood, propane, or other fuel is burned. CO may build up when appliances or engines are burned in an enclosed space.

What are common sources of CO?

Common sources of CO are furnaces, cars, generators (and other gasoline or diesel-powered engines), gas and propane heaters, gas stoves, wood stoves, charcoal grills, and fires.

What should I do if I think I have CO poisoning?

Because CO can't be seen or smelled, you may be unsure if you are at risk for CO poisoning. If you think you have CO poisoning, get to fresh air right away and call NC Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222. NC Poison Control nurses, pharmacists, and doctors can help you know what to do next.

How can I prevent CO poisoning?

Here are some steps you can take:

1. Make sure CO alarms are working and installed outside of sleeping areas and on every level of your home. Change the batteries two times each year, and interconnect CO alarms if possible so that when one sounds, they all sound.
2. Operate generators outside at least 20 feet from your home.
3. Don't leave a car running in an open or closed garage or carport.
4. Make sure the damper/flue is open on your wood-burning stoves and fireplaces. Have heating systems checked each year by a professional to make sure there's proper air flow.

