

Carbon Monoxide FAQs

What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, non-irritating, invisible gas that is produced when just about anything is burning, including natural gas, propane, gasoline and wood.

Because carbon monoxide is odorless, people must be aware of the conditions and sources of carbon monoxide that lead to the buildup of this gas, which when inhaled, can result in poisoning.

When am I most at risk for carbon monoxide poisoning?

Winter is a time when the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning increases. People need to take precautions; furnaces are in full operation, cars are left idling for long periods of time and people are using their fireplaces.

What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning?

Symptoms of carbon monoxide are fairly vague at first and can resemble the flu with headache, dizziness, nausea and vomiting. With more severe cases symptoms can progress to confusion, collapse, coma and death.

What kind of precautions can I take against carbon monoxide poisoning?

- Recognize potential sources of carbon monoxide at work, home or play.
 - Sources include fires, auto exhaust, cigarette smoke, water heaters, gas stoves, furnaces, wood-burning fireplaces, propane forklifts, ice resurfacing machines, blocked chimneys, generators, and gas barbecues.
- DO NOT operate fuel burning equipment in enclosed areas without proper ventilation.
- Keep fuel-burning equipment in proper working order.
- Ensure exhaust systems are in good repair.
- Ensure fumes are not able to enter vehicle interiors and are ventilated effectively.

What do I do if I think someone has carbon monoxide poisoning?

- **If you suspect someone has been exposed to carbon monoxide, everyone should remove themselves immediately from the suspected source and phone 911.**
- Deaths have occurred when victims have ignored signs and symptoms then “passed out” and were unable to remove themselves from the source.
- Call PADIS at 1-800-332-1414 for advice, or if you are simply unsure.

The [Poison and Drug Information Service \(PADIS\)](#) is a free, confidential, 24/7 service. Staff are specially trained in the assessment and management of exposures to poisons like carbon monoxide and are available by calling 1-800-332-1414.