



988170 Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE 68198-8170 • [www.NebraskaPoison.com](http://www.NebraskaPoison.com)

## Carbon Monoxide: You Can't See It, But It Can See You

Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning is a colorless and odorless killer of hundreds of people every year. It strikes without warning. Understanding where CO can come from and how to prevent it is key to keeping your home and loved ones safe. Older adults, especially those over 65, are at higher risk of CO poisoning. Symptoms of CO poisoning include headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, drowsiness, confusion, and loss of consciousness. These symptoms can be mistaken for the flu or other illnesses.

CO is a gas produced when there is not enough oxygen to burn the fuel completely (incomplete combustion).

### Sources include:

- Furnaces: If the furnace or its venting system is malfunctioning or not properly maintained, CO can build up in the home.
- Fireplaces and space heaters: Both gas and wood-burning types can emit CO if not vented properly or used in an enclosed space.
- Water heaters: If gas-powered, they can produce CO if there's incomplete combustion or if venting is blocked.
- Gas clothes dryers: Like other appliances, they can leak CO if they are not vented properly or if there is an issue with the appliance.
- Stoves, grills, generators, and power tools: Using these inside or in poorly ventilated areas can cause CO to accumulate.
- Vehicles: Running a car or any vehicle that burns fossil fuels in an enclosed or attached space, like a garage, can cause dangerous CO buildup.
- Other outdoor equipment: Things like lawnmowers, snow blowers, and even camping equipment like charcoal grills can all produce CO when used improperly indoors or in small, enclosed spaces.

**The first step in treating a person with CO poisoning is to make sure they have fresh air.** Further treatment in a healthcare facility may be necessary. The Poison Center's healthcare professionals are available to help callers with the management of CO exposures. The poison center may recommend that you call 911.

### Tips for CO poisoning prevention:

- Install carbon monoxide detectors on **every** level of your home, replace batteries every 6 months
- Recognize the early symptoms of CO poisoning
- Have all fuel-burning appliances inspected regularly
- Ventilate fuel and gas-burning heaters to the outside
- Never use a charcoal grill or hibachi inside
- Do not use a gas range or an oven for heating a room
- Never leave a car running in an attached garage, even with the garage door open
- Run generators at a safe distance from the home – never next to a window or a door
- Have vehicle muffler and tailpipes checked regularly
- Avoid sitting in a car with the engine running if deep snow or mud is blocking the exhaust pipe

***The Nebraska Poison Center offers tips on Carbon Monoxide safety and poison prevention. Call 1-800-222-1222 and speak directly to a Registered Nurse or Pharmacist immediately, 24/7/365.***