

Carbon monoxide poisoning

Your guide to protecting your home and family



Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause illness and even death. In fact, it is the most common cause of poisoning death in the United States. **Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include:**

- Mild headache and slight breathlessness if exposure is mild
- Flu-like symptoms, including severe headache, dizziness, confusion and fatigue, as well as impaired memory and coordination if exposure is prolonged
- Loss of consciousness if early symptoms are ignored

Furnaces, gas stoves and ovens, kerosene heaters, generators, vehicles and other items that burn fuel all produce carbon monoxide. Nationally, malfunctioning gas furnaces are the No. 1 cause of accidental carbon monoxide poisoning. When gas-burning appliances are maintained and used correctly, they can be perfectly safe. However, when gas-burning appliances malfunction, or when they are used inappropriately, such as without adequate ventilation, they become dangerous.

Here are some helpful tips to prevent carbon monoxide from affecting those you love.

Furnaces

Have a licensed heating contractor inspect your furnace each fall to ensure it is working properly for the winter season. All furnace work should be completed by a licensed heating professional.

Clothes dryers

If your clothes dryer is heated by gas, it should be properly vented outside using a hard-sided dryer vent, instead of flexible tubing. Regularly check the vent to ensure it does not become plugged with lint.

Stoves

Make sure your stove burners are burning cleanly. The flame should be blue, not orange. Never use the stove or oven to heat your home.

Cars

Never warm up your car in the garage, even with the garage door open. The fumes can build up and, if the garage is attached to your home, fumes can seep inside. Always warm up your car outdoors.

Kerosene heaters

Kerosene heaters are designed to be used with ventilation and must be exceptionally well maintained. They are not recommended to use to heat your home. Consider other heat sources such as portable electric heaters.

Generators

Never run a generator in your home, garage or basement. If you are concerned your outdoor generator might be stolen, invest in a lock.

Gas grills

Never barbecue in the garage. Keep your gas grill 10 feet away from open doors and windows and out from under overhangs.



Carbon monoxide alarms

Carbon monoxide alarms are all you need to detect carbon monoxide. These alarms can be purchased for as little as \$20.

Carbon monoxide alarms operate like fire detectors. They are battery powered, which means they will work even if there is a power outage. It is not necessary to buy the deluxe model or an alarm that also measures smoke and natural gas. An inexpensive carbon monoxide alarm will do.

The Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan, in cooperation with the Kent County Health Department, will install one carbon monoxide alarm for free to Kent County households with a child 13 years old or younger. For more information, contact the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan at **616.241.3300** or visit **healthyhomescoalition.org**

According to the website **carbonmonoxidekills.com**, "proper placement of a carbon monoxide detector is important. If you are installing only one carbon monoxide detector, the Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends it be located near the sleeping area, where it can wake you if you are asleep."

Do not install carbon monoxide detectors within 15 feet of heating or cooking appliances. Half of all unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning deaths could have been prevented by installing a simple detector.

Contact us

For more information, contact Helen DeVos Children's Hospital Injury Prevention Program at **616.391.SAFE (7233)** or visit **helendevoschildrens.org/injuryprevention**
If you have questions, email:
injuryprevention@helendevoschildrens.org

