

Each year hundreds of people experience what they think are the symptoms of flu: headaches, fatigue, nausea, and dizziness. These are actually symptoms of CO poisoning as well.

*some recover...  
some die*

## What is carbon monoxide (CO)?

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that can kill you if inhaled. You can not see it, smell it, or taste it. It is sometimes called the “silent killer” because it can take your life without warning. Most people that die in home fires die at night, while they are asleep. They don’t wake up because the CO puts them into a deeper sleep. They are unable to respond and escape.

## Why is it deadly?

When air containing CO is inhaled, it displaces oxygen in the bloodstream. It reduces the blood’s ability to carry oxygen to vital organs such as the heart and brain. In addition to flulike symptoms, it can cause vomiting, loss of consciousness, brain damage and/or death. Unborn babies, infants, senior citizens, and people with heart and breathing problems are at an especially high risk.

# ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR COMPREHENSIVE HOME FIRE SAFETY PROGRAM:

Have working smoke detectors.

Have and practice a home escape plan.

Get out! Stay out!



carbon monoxide is a stealthy **killer**



**Homeland Security  
and Emergency Services**

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**Homeland Security  
and Emergency Services**

Fire Prevention  
and Control

## Crowd Management

The symptoms of CO poisoning are flu-like, including headache, fatigue, nausea, dizziness, and confusion. Prolonged exposure can result in vomiting, blackouts, and, eventually, brain damage and death. The amount of CO inhaled and how long you are exposed to it determines the effect.

## What can be done to prevent CO poisoning?

- Make sure appliances are installed according to the manufacturer's instructions and by professionals.
- Have heating systems inspected and serviced at least once a year.
- Make sure chimneys and vents are checked for blockages, corrosion, and loose connections.
- Open flues completely when fireplaces are in use.
- Use proper fuel in space heaters.
- Never burn charcoal or a barbecue grill inside a home or enclosed space.
- Never use portable fuel-burning camping equipment inside a home, garage, vehicle, or tent.
- Never leave a car, mower, or other such item running in an attached garage, even with the garage door open.
- Never operate unvented fuel-burning appliances in any room where people are sleeping.
- Never use the kitchen range for heating a house.
- Never run a gas powered generator in a garage, basement, or near any overhang on the home. Keep it at a distance.

## Where does CO come from?

CO is a product of incomplete combustion. Any fuel-burning device has the potential to produce dangerous levels of CO gas. Examples of common devices that may emit CO include:

- Fuel-fired furnaces (not electric)
- Gas water heaters
- Fireplaces and wood stoves
- Gas stoves
- Non-electric space heaters
- Gas dryers
- Charcoal grills
- Lawnmowers, snowblowers, etc.
- Automobiles
- Gas powered generators



## Where should CO detectors be installed?

CO is almost identical in weight to air and thus mixes freely in it. For this reason, alarms may be installed at any level in a room.

If the detector is being mounted on a ceiling, it should be installed away from existing smoke alarms in order to be able to distinguish between the CO and smoke alarms in an emergency.

Every home should be equipped with at least one CO alarm near the sleeping area. For maximum protection, additional alarms should be located on each level of your home.

## What should I do if the CO alarm sounds?

Stay calm. Most situations resulting in activation of a CO detector are not life threatening and do not require calling the fire department. To determine if emergency services should be called, ask everyone in the house:

“Do you feel ill? Do you have flu-like symptoms of headache, nausea, or dizziness?”

If the answer to these questions by anyone in the house is “yes,” evacuate the house and have someone call the fire department. Failure to get out immediately may result in prolonged exposure, worsening effects from the CO. The best initial treatment for CO exposure is fresh air.

If the answer to the questions, by everyone, is “no,” the likelihood of a serious exposure is much less and you may not need to call the fire department. Instead, turn off all fuel-burning devices, ventilate the area, and attempt resetting the alarm. If the alarm will not reset or resounds, call a qualified technician to inspect, service, and/or repair your fuel-burning device. If at any time during this process someone begins to feel ill with the symptoms described above, evacuate everyone from the building to a safe location and call the fire department.

## How can I tell if CO is present in my home?

Since carbon monoxide is colorless, odorless, and tasteless, the best way to alert your family is to install a carbon monoxide detector/alarm to warn of the gas's build-up.



A Common Home CO Detector