



HEALTH NEWS FROM DR. YU

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department

Know Warning Sign of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

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The return of cold winter temperatures and the potential of power outages bring with it the threat of accidental carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide gas can come from burning fuels such as gasoline, propane, oil, kerosene, natural gas, coal, or wood. Carbon monoxide gas forms when the fuel does not burn completely.

Carbon monoxide does not have a tell-tale 'smell of smoke' so it can take the life of a healthy person without warning. Each year in the United States, hundreds of people die from carbon monoxide poisoning and thousands are hospitalized. Episodes tend to spike during cold weather and during power outages.

Physical symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include splitting headache, nausea, shortness of breath, vomiting, lethargy, fatigue, dizziness, and mental confusion. These symptoms are often mistaken for the flu.

- Carbon monoxide can cause permanent brain damage, and can cause chest pains or heart attacks in people with heart disease.
- Carbon monoxide poisoning can kill, at times quickly.
- If you believe you could be experiencing carbon monoxide poisoning, go outside and get fresh air immediately. Call for medical help from a neighbor's home. The Fire Department will tell you when it is safe to reenter the home.

As the mercury drops, review the following tips to avoid accidental injury or death from carbon monoxide.

- **Do** install carbon monoxide alarms in the hallways outside of sleeping areas. Change the batteries twice a year at the same time you change smoke detector batteries. Have your gas or oil burning furnace inspected for leaks and serviced by a professional each year. Inspect and service all chimneys and vents. A blocked vent (from soot or a birds nest, for example) can cause carbon monoxide to back up into the house.
- **Do not** use a generator indoors or in a garage or carport. Do not warm up your vehicle by idling the engine inside an attached garage. Do not use other gas or kerosene burning equipment indoors. Never cook or heat with charcoal barbeques inside your home, even inside a fireplace. Do not use a gas oven or range to heat your home. Do not line the bottom of a gas oven with foil, as it may block air vents. Avoid gas or kerosene "space heaters" unless there is an exhaust vent.

If you have a gas, propane, kerosene, coal, or wood burning furnace, heater, or hot water supply be alert to possible problems. Signs that your device may be leaking deadly carbon monoxide gas include a decreased hot water supply, continually running furnace that doesn't seem to heat the house properly, burning odor, increased moisture on the inside of windows, or soot deposits, especially on vents and heating devices. Have a professional inspection done if there are any questions about safety.

For more information on carbon monoxide, visit Washington Department of Health website at www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/IAQ/co_fact_sheet.htm. There you can find fact sheets on preventing carbon monoxide poisoning in six languages. Consider sharing the information with friends and neighbors.

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