

FACTSHEET

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Carbon monoxide poisoning

What is Carbon Monoxide?

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a clear gas that you cannot smell. It is produced when any organic substance (e.g. wood, fuel, coal) does not burn completely.

Where is it found?

Common sources of CO in Australia are BBQs, outdoor heaters and braziers, bonfires, fire pits and car, boat or generator exhausts. Gas heaters and cookers can produce CO if they are faulty or connected to the wrong type of gas.

When does CO poisoning occur?

CO poisoning occurs most often when outside heating and cooking items are brought inside to an enclosed area. When there is not enough air to burn the substance cleanly, CO is produced and can be inhaled causing poisoning. This often happens at night when people are looking for easy or inexpensive heating, such as when camping or in temporary accommodation.

Poisoning also occurs when cars, boats or generators (especially diesel) are left running without adequate airflow or in an enclosed space. CO can get into a room or cabin through a window or door and become trapped.

What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

If you breathe in CO, it binds with haemoglobin in your blood, taking the place of oxygen. This means your blood cannot carry oxygen to all the parts of your body where it is needed, including the heart and brain. This causes symptoms such as:

- headache
- nausea
- vomiting
- dizziness
- weakness
- fainting
- confusion
- tiredness

Extended exposures can cause:

- seizures
- loss of consciousness
- coma
- permanent brain injury
- death

Who is at risk of CO poisoning?

CO poisoning can affect anyone and often involves many members of a household from young infants to the elderly.

People at higher risk of CO poisoning include:

- babies
- pregnant women
- elderly
- people with chronic medical problems, like heart disease.

How to prevent CO poisoning

- Ensure outdoor BBQs and heaters are used in an open area OUTSIDE.
- Only use approved indoor heaters inside for warmth and have these serviced at least every 2 years by a registered gas fitter. This will ensure emission levels are safe.
- Leave coals from BBQs, heaters and bonfires outside. They can produce CO even if there is no smoke.
- If using a generator, make sure it's outlet is positioned away from the house.
- Do not leave a car running in a garage or car park even if the garage door is open.
- Install an audible carbon monoxide detector alarm for added safety if using indoor gas heaters, generators and on boats.

Remember:

- Leave outdoor heating and cooking units OUTDOORS
- Early Symptoms of CO poisoning include
 - headache
 - nausea
 - vomiting
 - dizziness

If you think someone may be poisoned call the Poisons Information Centre on 131126 or 000, if any loss of consciousness has occurred.