

'Tis the season to check for carbon monoxide

HOW DO YOU TAKE a picture of something that is tasteless, colorless, and odorless? It may be difficult; if you can't taste, see, or smell a substance, chances are you are not going to know it is present.

That is why carbon monoxide is called "the silent killer." More than 800 people die from carbon monoxide poisoning each year, and countless others are left with chronic headaches, learning problems and personality changes.

Most people turn on their heaters in the winter. Winter, especially Holiday-time, is the time for a fire cheerily crackling in the fireplace or wood stove. In addition, many people bring equipment into their homes and garages in the winter. Since windows and doors are generally shut tight to keep the cold and wind out, dangerous carbon monoxide fumes can leak inside — posing very serious danger to those within.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning may vary, ranging in intensity from mild to incapacitating. It can sometimes mimic a mild

"bug" or virus, but without a fever. Not all members of a group show the same symptoms. You may experience any or all of the following: headache, nausea, weakness, lethargy, unconsciousness, seizure, or death.

Any home with gas/fuel appliances should have a UL Approved Carbon Monoxide Alarm that is loud enough to wake the family placed in the living/sleeping area. Carbon Monoxide Alarms are available at most hardware and discount stores for under \$50.

An annual maintenance check by a furnace service and installation company, or a gas or utility company can often detect problems before they become dangerous.

Some sources of carbon monoxide:

■ Heaters: If you use anything other than electric

heat, you should always have a source of ventilation and a carbon monoxide detector. Even if the manufacturer says "burns efficiently," there's always the possibility of a malfunction.

■ Vehicles: Never let your vehicle warm up in the garage or work in a garage when a vehicle is running even if the garage door is open. Don't open the rear window of a van, station wagon, sport utility vehicle or truck when it's running; exhaust fumes can be pulled into the vehicle. The exhaust system of your vehicle should be regularly checked and maintained.

■ Grills: Never bring them indoors to cook or to use as a heat source.

■ Fireplaces and wood stoves: When burning a fire in the fireplace or wood stove, open a window slightly for ventilation. Many of the new and renovated homes seal so well that when the doors and windows are closed, the fireplace does not draw properly.

If you suspect a carbon dioxide problem in your home, leave immediately and call the fire department from a neighbor's house. Anybody with symptoms of carbon monoxide toxicity should be taken to the nearest emergency room.

Untreated carbon monoxide exposure may lead to permanent brain and nervous system problems such as headaches, learning disorders, memory deficits, personality changes; sometimes severe. If you feel you cannot afford the cost of a Carbon Monoxide Detector or an emergency room visit, consider this: Can you or your children afford permanent memory loss or learning impairment? Symptomatic carbon monoxide poisoning is an emergency that needs to be evaluated and treated by professionals.



**Monica
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It's Your
Health

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