



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

ELIZABETH HERTEL
DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Nov. 8, 2024

CONTACT: Laina Stebbins
517-241-2112
StebbinsL@michigan.gov

Michigan residents reminded of carbon monoxide dangers; routinely check detectors and appliances

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) urge residents to protect their family by taking preventative measures against carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning and check CO detectors and fuel-burning appliances.

Carbon monoxide is known as the “Invisible Killer.” You cannot see, taste or smell it, but it can be deadly when you breathe it in. CO is found where carbon-based fuels like gasoline, propane, charcoal, wood and others are burned. The gas can build up to deadly levels within minutes in enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces.

“Carbon monoxide poisoning can happen to anyone if there are no safety measures in place,” said State Fire Marshal Kevin Sehlmeier. “The only way to tell if it is present is with a carbon monoxide detector. Most CO poisonings take place at home and are caused by items that are not properly installed, cared for or vented like furnaces, water heaters, generators, grills, dryers, space heaters, fireplaces, chimneys and gas stoves. Having these appliances checked yearly by professionals will reduce CO poisoning from happening.”

“Carbon monoxide poisoning symptoms are similar to the flu,” said Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, chief medical executive. “Symptoms include fatigue, headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, drowsiness and confusion. Carbon monoxide poisoning can lead to coma and death, so these symptoms should not be ignored.”

If you suspect you may be experiencing CO poisoning, or your CO detector alarm alerts, go outside immediately and call 911. Stay away from the enclosed space, even if you aren’t experiencing symptoms, until the fire department tells you it is safe to return.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that each year approximately 100,000 people across the country visit the emergency department for accidental CO poisoning. In 2022, there were 727 Michigan emergency department visits for CO poisoning (MiTracking Data Portal).

CO exposure may be particularly dangerous for:

- Developing babies: Fetal blood cells absorb CO more easily than adult blood cells.
- Children: Children have smaller bodies and breathe more rapidly than adults, potentially taking in more of the gas.
- Older adults: Older adults are very susceptible to carbon monoxide poisoning and may be more likely to develop brain damage following exposure to the gas.

- People who have heart disease: CO causes direct damage to the heart, which permanently impairs heart function. People who have pre-existing heart disease are at greater risk for serious adverse health effects following exposure.
- Those with chronic exposure: People who are repeatedly exposed to carbon monoxide can incur more severe health effects at lower levels of exposure.

CO poisoning is preventable. Here are some prevention tips to follow:

- Install CO detectors. Detectors should be on every level of your home including the basement, mechanical rooms and near sleeping areas.
- Replace detectors every five years or according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Test detectors monthly to ensure they work.
- Generators should be run at a safe distance (**at least 20 feet**) from the home. Never run a generator in the home, garage or next to windows, doors or other enclosed spaces. Remember that CO can build up and linger for hours, even when the generator has been shut off.
- Maintain and use fuel-burning devices correctly. Have heating systems, water heater and any fuel-burning devices inspected by a professional every year. Make sure gas appliances are vented properly.
- Where you have fuel-burning devices, use a CO detector. Have a detector handy when camping or hunting and/or when using tents, cabins, RVs and boats with enclosed cabins.
- Never run a car in an enclosed space. If a vehicle is running in the garage, the garage door must be fully open to allow harmful fumes to escape.
- Use fuel-burning devices outside only. Never run a gasoline or propane heater or charcoal, gas or wood grill inside your home or in any enclosed space, including a garage.

Additional CO poisoning and poisoning prevention information is available at the following sites:

State of Michigan

- LARA
 - [MI Prevention.](#)
- MDHHS
 - [CO and Generators \(Video\).](#)
 - [MiTracking - CO Poisoning.](#)

National

- [CDC - CO Poisoning Basics.](#)
- [Consumer Product Safety Commission.](#)
- [National CO Awareness Association.](#)

Visit Michigan.gov/MiTracking for more information about CO poisoning.

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