

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Factsheet

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous clear gas that you can't taste or smell. Breathing it in can make you sick and can lead to death if exposed to high levels

Common sources

Common sources of carbon monoxide (CO) in Australia include barbeques, charcoal briquettes and grills, outdoor heaters, gas lanterns, tools with small gasoline engines (such as pressure washers or concrete saws), and engine exhausts (from your car and boat).

When does carbon monoxide poisoning occur?

Carbon monoxide poisoning is caused by inhaling carbon monoxide gas, which is produced when fuels don't burn completely.

Carbon monoxide poisoning often occurs when outside heating or cooking items, such as charcoal barbeques, are brought inside and are used in an enclosed area. This usually occurs at night when people are looking for easy or inexpensive heating.

Poisoning also occurs when cars, boats or generators (especially diesel) are left running without adequate airflow or in an enclosed space.

Fuel-powered pressure washers or concrete saws can also lead to carbon monoxide poisoning when they are used indoors, or in an enclosed space (such as a barn or shed, tank or cellar).

What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning?

Common symptoms include:

- headache
- nausea and stomach pain
- vomiting
- dizziness
- weakness
- fainting
- confusion
- tiredness

Extended exposure can cause:

- loss of consciousness
- seizures

- permanent brain injury
- death

Symptoms of poisoning gradually get worse with prolonged exposure. If you think yourself, or someone you know, has been exposed to carbon monoxide contact the NSW Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26.

In an emergency or if someone has collapsed or is unconscious, call triple zero (000) for an ambulance and seek medical assistance.

Who is most at risk?

Carbon monoxide poisoning can affect anyone. People at higher risk include:

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

How to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning

- Do not use barbeques, charcoal briquettes and/or grills, outdoor heaters or gas lanterns inside. They can produce carbon monoxide even if there is no smoke.
- Keep coals from barbeques outside.
- Do not use generators inside, or in an enclosed space. If you are using one, make sure it is not near a window or door and is pointed away from the house.
- Do not leave your car running in the garage (even when the garage door is open).
- Only use fuel-powered appliances (such as pressure washers or concrete saws) outside, or in well ventilated spaces.
- Only use approved indoor heaters inside for warmth and have them serviced at least every 2 years by a registered gas fitter. If you use this type of heater, consider installing an audible carbon monoxide detector alarm for added safety.