



## Fond du Lac County Health Department

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**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
**Fond du Lac County  
Health Department**

# Carbon Monoxide Fact Sheet

## What is carbon monoxide?

- Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas.
- It is formed during incomplete burning of fuels, such as gasoline, kerosene, natural gas, oil, coal, or wood.
- Carbon monoxide is also found in cigarette smoke and vehicle exhaust.
- In homes, carbon monoxide can quickly build up from a poorly vented or malfunctioning heater, furnace, range or any fuel-powered appliance, or from a car left idling in a garage.
- Carbon monoxide is the most common cause of fatal poisonings.

## What is carbon monoxide poisoning?

- Carbon monoxide poisoning is caused by the inhalation of dangerous amounts of carbon monoxide gas.
- When carbon monoxide is inhaled, the body is deprived of oxygen because carbon monoxide takes the place of oxygen in the blood.
- Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are often described as “flu-like” and non-specific.
- These include headache, dizziness, weakness, impaired coordination, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, loss of consciousness and death.
- At high levels, carbon monoxide poisoning can cause death within minutes.
- People who are sleeping or drunk can die from carbon monoxide poisoning before they have symptoms.
- Those specifically at an increase for negative outcomes related to carbon monoxide exposure are infants, pregnant women, and those with chronic respiratory conditions; however, carbon monoxide poisoning can affect anyone.
- In Wisconsin, carbon monoxide poisonings are most likely to occur during the winter months.

## How can I prevent carbon monoxide poisoning?

- Install a carbon monoxide detector.
- This detector should be a battery-operated or battery back-up detector
- Check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall.
- Have a qualified technician perform an annual evaluation of your heating system, water heater, and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances.

- Never run your car or truck inside a garage that is attached to a house even with the garage door open.
- Always open the door to a detached garage to let in fresh air when you run a car or truck inside.

## What do I do if I think someone may have been exposed to dangerous levels of carbon monoxide?

- Get that individual into a well-ventilated area as soon as possible to reduce exposure.
- Contact your local health care provider as soon as possible.

### Learn more:

- [Carbon Monoxide—Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#)
- [Carbon Monoxide Poisoning—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Exposure to Elevated Carbon Monoxide Levels at an Indoor Ice Arena-Wisconsin, 2014—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)
- [Notes from the Field: Occupational Carbon Monoxide Exposure in an Industrial Kitchen Facility-Wisconsin, 2017—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

