

Don't Be the Next Statistic

– Carbon Monoxide Poisoning KILLS –

(Newark, NJ) Today, the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES) consulted on a case where two adults were rushed to a local hospital with carbon monoxide poisoning. Within several hours of turning on their furnace, both patients' developed dizziness, lightheadedness and a general feeling of being sick. While both patients received oxygen therapy and did well, the outcome could have been much worse.

The sudden shift in cold weather caught many off guard, forcing them to turn on their heating systems without having them properly serviced beforehand. Unfortunately, this puts loved ones at risk for serious injury and possible death from carbon monoxide. Just last week, 11 residents in an apartment building became ill from carbon monoxide. Several people required hyperbaric oxygen therapy at hospitals in NJ and NY.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is called the "Silent Killer" because it is a gas that gives no warning – you can't see it, smell it or taste it. Exposure to carbon monoxide can produce headaches, sleepiness, fatigue, confusion and irritability at low levels. At higher levels, it can result in nausea, vomiting, irregular heartbeat, impaired vision and coordination, and death. During cold and influenza season, symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can easily be confused with symptoms of viral illnesses like the common cold and the flu.

Although everyone is at risk at any time throughout the year, poison centers get the most calls about exposures/poisonings during the fall/winter heating season. The most effective way to prevent exposure to this deadly gas is to be sure your heating system and other gas, oil, wood, kerosene or coal-burning appliances are working and properly vented. A professional should service these each year before turning them on for the season. The well-being of you and your family depend on it.

"Prevention and early detection are crucial in preventing poisoning injury and even death from carbon monoxide," says Diane Calello, MD, NJ Poison Control Center Executive and Medical Director, Rutgers NJ Medical School. "You want to catch a leak before it turns into a serious problem." Install battery-operated carbon monoxide detectors on every level of the home and near every sleeping area. Remember to check the batteries of both detectors (fire and CO) when you change the clocks twice a year for daylight savings time.

Here are some safety tips to help reduce your risk of CO exposure/poisoning.

1. If you do not have any carbon monoxide detectors, install them right away. If your detectors are old and/or not working properly, replace them right away.

2. Gas appliances must have adequate ventilation. If need be, keep a window slightly cracked to allow airflow.
3. Open flues when fireplaces are in use.
4. Never use the stove to heat your home/apartment.
5. Only use generators outside. Keep them more than 20 feet from both you and your neighbor's home, doors, or windows.
6. Do not bring generators, pressure washers, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside your home, basement, garage, carport, camper, boat cabin, or tent – or even outside near an open window or door.
7. DO NOT cook with charcoal indoors.
8. DO NOT idle a car in a closed garage. Once you pull in, immediately turn off the engine.

If you suspect Carbon Monoxide poisoning, take immediate action:

1. If someone is unconscious or unresponsive, get him or her out of the house and call 9-1-1 immediately.
2. Exit the house/building immediately. Do not waste time opening windows. This will delay your escape and cause you to breathe in even more dangerous fumes.
3. Contact your local fire department/energy provider.
4. Call the NJ Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 for immediate treatment advice. Do not waste time looking for information on the internet about carbon monoxide poisoning. Call us for fast, free and accurate information.

Carbon monoxide poisoning is serious. Get help right away if you suspect someone was exposed. Call the NJ Poison Control Center unless the person is unconscious, not breathing, hard to wake up, or seizing then call 9-1-1. Poison control centers are a great resource for information and emergencies. Keep us at your fingertips. Save the Poison Help number (1-800-222-1222) as a contact in your cell phone.

Help is Just a Phone Call Away!