



UNIVERSITY OF UTAH  
COLLEGE OF PHARMACY

Utah Poison  
Control Center

**QUESTAR**  
Gas



## **For Immediate Release**

### **RISK FOR CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING INCREASES IN WINTER**

SALT LAKE CITY (*November 2010*) – Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning kills more than 400 people and sends an additional 20,000 to emergency rooms nationwide each year. Utah has already experienced several cases of CO poisoning this fall. In Utah, 377 cases of CO poisoning and 18 deaths were reported in 2008\* (the latest numbers available). As winter approaches, the risk for CO poisoning increases. The four agencies noted in this press release are collaborating to remind Utahns that they need to know the symptoms of CO poisoning and take precautions to prevent it.

#### **What is CO?**

CO is an odorless, invisible gas produced when gasoline, natural gas, propane, kerosene, and other fuels are not completely burned during use. Automobile exhaust is the most common source of CO, but small gas engines, camp lanterns and stoves, charcoal grills, and gas ranges and furnaces also produce it. When appliances and furnaces are improperly adjusted and used in poorly ventilated areas, dangerous amounts of CO can build up in the blood, replacing the oxygen, and potentially cause asphyxiation.

#### **Recognizing CO Poisoning Symptoms**

Although everyone is susceptible to CO poisoning, unborn babies, infants, the elderly, and people with respiratory problems are particularly at risk. Because CO is invisible and odorless, it is important to know the symptoms of CO poisoning and to immediately seek medical help if those symptoms occur.

The most common symptoms are:

- persistent, severe headaches and dizziness (usually affecting more than one person in an enclosed area).
- nausea, vomiting and fatigue.
- the disappearance of symptoms when individuals leave the structure.

If the presence of CO is suspected based on these symptoms, evacuate all persons from the structure and call the Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222, or 911.

## CO Prevention

People can avoid CO poisoning through simple prevention measures and common sense. For example, most fire-related CO poisoning can be prevented by the proper installation and maintenance of smoke detectors. Here are some other tips for preventing CO poisoning:

- Have your heating system, water heater, and any other gas-, oil-, wood- or coal-burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- Install an Underwriters Laboratory approved CO monitor on each level of your home. Check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall. Installing a CO monitor should never be a substitute for a professional inspection of home heating and cooking equipment. Owners of boats and recreational vehicles with propane stoves or heaters should install CO detectors.
- Inspect homes after heavy snow fall and make sure snow is removed from around exhaust stacks, vents, and fresh-air intakes.
- If your CO monitor alarms continuously, evacuate your home and call 911 or your local gas company. If the alarm is only intermittent, change the batteries.
- Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect CO poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseated. Immediately call the poison control center at 1-800-222-1222.
- Do not use a generator, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline- or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement or garage or near a window. Generators should be located at least 20 feet from an occupied structure.
- Do not run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house, even if you leave the door open.
- Do not burn anything in a stove or fireplace that is not vented.
- Do not heat your house with a gas oven.

Knowledge is the key to preventing carbon monoxide poisoning. Anyone who thinks he or she has CO poisoning should call the poison control center at the above number or call 911.

\* For additional information regarding exposures, hospitalizations and emergency department visits, and deaths relating to CO poisoning in Utah, visit the Indicator-Based Information System for Public Health's website at: <http://ibis.health.utah.gov/indicator/index/Alphabetical.html>, scroll down to carbon monoxide.

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