



Poison HOTLINE

1-800-222-1222

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Did you know



The CDC strongly recommends installing battery-operated or battery-backup carbon monoxide alarms near every sleeping area in your home. Regularly check your alarms to ensure they're working correctly. A helpful reminder can be to check the batteries when you change your clocks in the spring and fall. It is also recommended to replace your CO alarm according to the manufacturer's recommendations or every 5 years.

If your carbon monoxide alarm is beeping, evacuate your home immediately with all family members and pets. Call 911 to report the alarm and mention if anyone is experiencing carbon monoxide poisoning symptoms. Stay out of your home until emergency responders have confirmed it is safe to return.

Finally, always remember, **there is no such thing as a false alarm.** The source may be transient, like a car exhaust, but there is always a source.

An Invisible Danger: Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas produced by the incomplete combustion of carbon-containing substances. Common sources of CO include house fires, furnaces, stoves, water heaters, fireplaces, and vehicle exhaust. Another potential source is methylene chloride (often used as a paint stripper or degreaser) which can be absorbed through inhalation, ingestion, or dermal contact and is subsequently metabolized to CO. Hemoglobin has an affinity for CO more than 200 times greater than it does for oxygen. Because of this, CO impairs oxygen delivery, leading to cellular hypoxia and ischemia.

The most common symptoms of CO poisoning include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. CO poisoning can be mistaken for influenza, food poisoning, colic, or gastroenteritis. Severe exposure can lead to loss of consciousness, cardiac ischemia, ventricular arrhythmias, metabolic acidosis, respiratory failure, seizures, and death.

Treatment for CO includes removing the patient from the source of CO exposure, administering 100% oxygen per a tight-fitting mask or mechanical ventilation if the patient is intubated, and determining if hyperbaric oxygen (HBO) therapy is indicated.

Although indications for HBO may vary across institutions, reasonable indications for HBO in the context of CO poisoning include:

- Coma
- Loss of consciousness
- Seizure(s)
- Altered mental status (Glasgow Coma Scale <15 or confusion)
- Abnormal cerebellar function on physical exam
- Carboxyhemoglobin > 25%
- Pregnant patient with any of the following:
 - Carboxyhemoglobin >15%
 - Age >35 years old
 - Exposure to CO for \geq 24 hours
 - Fetal distress

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