

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



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Governor

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Vision: To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

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WITH THE ARRIVAL OF COLD WEATHER, HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE FLORIDIANS TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

~ Never use gas stove or oven to heat the home ~

~ Avoid using unvented gas, kerosene heaters or generators in enclosed spaces ~

~ Install battery operated CO alarms or plug-in CO alarms with battery backup inside the house ~

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida Department of Health urges Floridians to take precautions to prevent carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning as winter weather reaches down into central areas of the state this week.

As temperatures drop, the potential for CO poisonings rise. CO is a highly poisonous gas produced by burning fuels such as gasoline, natural gas, kerosene, charcoal and wood. The risk of illness or death increases with the level of CO in the air and the amount of time exposed. Dangerous CO levels can result when home appliances are not properly maintained or when used incorrectly.

“Improper use of generators or portable space heaters can silently poison you and your family without your knowledge.” said Dr. Kendra Goff, State Toxicologist for the Florida Department of Health. “Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that can literally be fatal within minutes. It is invisible, tasteless, odorless and non-irritating which is why taking proper precautions is vital and having sufficient working CO detectors in your home is critical.”

Since symptoms of CO poisoning are similar to those of the flu, food poisoning or other illnesses, you may not think CO poisoning is the cause. The common signs and symptoms include headache, nausea, weakness, abdominal discomfort/pain, dizziness and confusion. Other signs and symptoms may include blurred vision, numbness and tingling, ataxia (loss or lack of muscular coordination), irritability, agitation, chest pain, shortness of breath, palpitations, seizures and loss of consciousness.

Anyone who suspects symptoms of CO poisoning should go outside the home or building without delay and seek prompt medical attention. If a person has collapsed or is not breathing, call 911 for emergency medical assistance immediately from a safer location such as outside or from a neighbor's home. Children, pregnant women and individuals with heart conditions are most vulnerable.

Tips to help prevent CO poisoning:

- Never use a gas stove or oven to heat the home.
- Never burn charcoal inside a house, garage, vehicle or tent, including in a fireplace.
- Avoid using unvented gas or kerosene heaters in enclosed spaces, especially sleeping areas.
- Install and use fuel-burning appliances according to manufacturer instructions.
- Inspect the exhaust system of each fuel burning appliance every year, including chimneys, flues and vents. Check for blockage, holes and disconnections.
- Have fuel-burning appliances inspected and serviced annually by a licensed contractor.
- Never leave an automobile running in a garage, even with the garage door open.

Florida Department of Health

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- Do not leave the rear window or tailgate of a vehicle open while driving. CO from the exhaust can be pulled inside the car, van or camper.
- Never use a portable generator or a fuel-powered tool indoors or in other enclosed or partially enclosed areas.
- Always place portable generators outdoors on a dry surface far away from doors, windows, vents and air conditioning equipment that could allow CO to enter. Orient the generator so that it is placed with the exhaust port pointing away from the home.
- Install battery operated CO alarms or plug-in CO alarms with battery backup inside the house according to manufacturer's installation instructions or NFPA 720: Standard for the Installation of Carbon Monoxide (CO) Detection and Warning Equipment.
- Install only CO alarms that meet the UL 2034 or the CSA 6.19 standards.
- Replace CO alarm batteries once a year and test alarms frequently.
- Replace CO alarms every five years or as often as recommended by the alarm manufacturer.

For more information about suspected poisoning emergencies, call the Florida Poison Information Center at 1-800-222-1222. To learn more about indoor air pollution and public health in Florida, visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov/healthy-environments/indoor-air-quality/index.html> or call the Radon and Indoor Air Program at 1-800-543-8279.

In addition, cold weather shelters have been opened in a number of counties. For a list of cold weather shelters in your area, contact your county emergency management agency. Visit http://www.floridadisaster.org/County_EM/ASP/county.asp.

The Department works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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