



Vehicle-related Carbon Monoxide (CO) Poisoning Fact Sheet

Vehicle-related carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning can occur when CO gas, a colorless and odorless toxic gas, builds up in an enclosed space such as a vehicle cabin or garage.

QUICK FACTS

- CO is an odorless, colorless gas that is emitted by vehicle exhaust systems
- Each year, more than 400 Americans die from unintentional CO poisoning not linked to fires, more than 100,000 visit the emergency room, and more than 14,000 are hospitalized. Many of these deaths occurred as the result of a motor vehicle (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).
- Keyless ignitions are at a higher risk of being accidentally left running in the garage

HOW DOES VEHICLE-RELATED CARBON MONOXIDE HAPPEN?

- vehicle inadvertently left running inside the garage of a home, especially those with keyless ignitions
- running or warming up a vehicle in any enclosed space such as a home garage (even with the garage door open), car wash, parking garage, inside a building, or a confined area.
- mechanical problems can cause CO to leak into the cabin of a vehicle, vehicles leaking CO into vehicle cabins have been the cause of major recalls and tragedies
- tailpipe becomes clogged by snow, ice or debris
- driving a vehicle with the trunk lid or rear tailgate open
- allowing a passenger to ride under the topper on a pickup truck

SIGNS OF CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

CO is an odorless, colorless gas that is emitted by furnaces, charcoal grills, and running vehicles. Often called the “silent or invisible killer,” the deadly gas often goes undetected, striking victims who are caught off guard or succumb in their sleep.

Below are some signs of carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Headache
- Disorientation and confusion
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Loss of consciousness

SAFETY TIPS

- Keep working carbon monoxide detectors in all areas of the home, especially near sleeping areas.
- Replace batteries twice a year and replace detectors every 6-10 years.
- Never leave a vehicle running in the garage, not even with the garage door open.
- Never warm up a vehicle in any enclosed or partially enclosed space.
- Do not put children or adults inside a running vehicle while warming or clearing snow or ice off the vehicle.
- Always clear the tailpipe of a vehicle in inclement weather conditions. If the tailpipe becomes clogged with ice, snow or other debris, carbon monoxide can leak into the passenger compartment of the vehicle. (do the same in your home's dryer, fireplace and furnace vents)
- Consider adding an aftermarket CO detector to the inside of your vehicle. Do not use a standard "home" CO monitor as they are not sensitive enough for the inside of a vehicle. We recommend using a low-level monitor that sounds an alarm.
- Keyless ignitions vehicles should always be double-checked to ensure the vehicle has been turned off. Even if you take the key fob with you, the vehicle could keep running. (Learn more about the dangers of keyless ignitions [HERE](#))
- Check for recalls on your vehicle during daylight savings time so you remember to do it twice per year. (NHTSAs online recall checker [HERE](#))
- Ensure proper maintenance of the vehicle's exhaust system to minimize the risk of leaks and have a yearly inspection by a professional mechanic for exhaust system safety issues.
- Keep rear vent windows, lift gates, doors and trunk lids closed while driving to prevent exhaust fumes from being drawn into the vehicle cabin.
- During busy times and changes in routine be extra cautious as distractions and multi-tasking can lead to forgetting to turn the car off.
- Keep vehicles locked at all times and make sure keys and remote openers are out of reach of children.
- Do not use portable generators, grills, or other fuel-burning devices inside or near the vehicle.

IF YOU SUSPECT CO IN THE CABIN OF YOUR VEHICLE WHILE DRIVING

A tell-tale sign of carbon monoxide poisoning may be headaches or nausea while driving.

- Immediately open all windows
- Pull over in a safe location
- All passengers exit the vehicle and stay out
- Call 911

IF CO ALARMS SOUND IN THE HOME

- Immediately move all people and pets outside to fresh air
- Call 911
- Do not reenter the home until authorities have given you permission to do so

For more information on how to keep your family safe in and around vehicles, visit www.KidsAndCarSafety.org.