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**Falling temperatures mean rising risk of carbon monoxide poisoning**

*State health department offers advice on how to protect your family*

Home heating systems help ward off winter's chill, but faulty systems also increase the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

State health officials are urging Missourians to make certain their furnaces and other heat sources are working correctly to prevent carbon monoxide from seeping into their homes. Missourians can also lower the risk by installing carbon monoxide detectors.

"Carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless and tasteless gas that can make you sick," said Randy Maley, environmental public health specialist at the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. "In high quantities, it can kill."

Last year, 49 people in Missouri died from carbon monoxide exposure and 287 others were sent to hospital emergency departments.

Carbon monoxide is released when fuels – including gasoline, natural gas, propane, kerosene, charcoal and wood – are burned. Carbon monoxide poisoning can come from a variety of sources including furnaces, space heaters, stoves, generators, hot water heaters, clothes dryers, kerosene heaters, wood stoves and fireplaces. Cars, trucks and boats can also produce high levels of carbon monoxide.

Because the gas can easily go unnoticed, health officials recommend the use of carbon monoxide detectors, which are similar to smoke detectors. They are relatively inexpensive and can be purchased at department or hardware stores and online. The detectors can alert residents to the presence of carbon monoxide before symptoms of poisoning appear.

"By the time you experience symptoms, it may be too late to call for help," Maley said. "If you suspect carbon monoxide in your home or vehicle, you need to get out of your house or away from your car and into the open air."

Early symptoms of carbon monoxide exposure include:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Sleepiness

- Nausea
- Vomiting

Carbon monoxide can also cause people with heart disease to develop an irregular heartbeat. Exposure to higher concentrations of the gas can cause disorientation, coma and convulsions, eventually concluding in death.

Anyone who suspects they are suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning should get fresh air immediately and seek medical help.

Additional precautions to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- Natural gas-fueled appliances should be installed and operated according to the manufacturer's instructions;
- Have your home heating and ventilation systems inspected annually;
- Do not use natural gas-fueled appliances such as an oven, cooking stove or clothes dryer to heat your home, even for a short time;
- Do not burn charcoal inside a house, garage, vehicle, or tent or in a fireplace for heating or cooking;
- Do not use unvented gas or kerosene heaters in closed spaces, especially near or in sleeping areas; Opening a door or window does not allow enough fresh air to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning;
- Never leave an automobile running in a closed garage or in a garage attached to the house even with the garage door open;
- Do not use any gasoline-powered engines, such as mowers, weed trimmers, chainsaws, power washers or generators, in enclosed spaces;
- Be aware that all boat motors are a source of carbon monoxide. Do not allow any swimming near the exhaust and keep children away from the boat motor;
- Do not leave the rear window or back door of a vehicle open while driving, and repair leaking exhaust pipes and mufflers on automobiles.

For more information about preventing carbon monoxide poisoning, visit the state health department's Web site at [www.dhss.mo.gov/CO/](http://www.dhss.mo.gov/CO/).

Note: Audio associated with this news release is available at:  
[www.dhss.mo.gov/NewsAndPublicNotices/audio/co\\_poisoning09.html](http://www.dhss.mo.gov/NewsAndPublicNotices/audio/co_poisoning09.html)

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