

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that can kill you. You cannot smell it or see it. Each year hundreds of people in the U.S. die from CO poisoning, and thousands are sent to the emergency room. CO poisoning happens most often during the colder months in Vermont. Follow these tips to stay safe.

## How to Prevent CO Poisoning

CO is produced when liquid, solid or gas fuel is burned—such as natural gas, propane, oil, charcoal, wood and wood pellets. Dangerous levels can build up quickly in your home, garage or other enclosed area. Here are ways to prevent CO poisoning:

- Install a CO alarm with a battery backup near all sleeping areas in your home. Replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall. Test the alarm monthly.
- Have all fuel-burning heating systems and appliances inspected and serviced every year by a Vermont-certified technician, including furnaces, boilers, wood stoves, chimneys, hot water heaters, stoves and clothes dryers.
- Make sure fuel-burning appliances or equipment vent outside and the pipes are tightly joined and not cracked or rusty.
- Do not use a stove or fireplace that is not vented or may be clogged.
- Clear snow, ice and plants away from any outside vents of fuel-burning equipment.
- Never use a charcoal grill, generator, camp stove, kerosene heater or other fuel-burning device inside a home, basement, garage, crawlspace, near a window, in a tent, or in any partially enclosed area.
- Never use a gas cooking range or oven to heat your home.
- Never run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house, even if the garage door is left open. Be aware that remote car starters may turn on a vehicle by accident.

### Dial 9-1-1 and get fresh air immediately if:

- The CO alarm goes off.
- You suspect CO poisoning and you or someone else has the symptoms listed below.

## Know the Signs and Symptoms of CO Poisoning

- Breathing in a lot of CO can make you pass out or kill you.
- People who are sleeping or drinking alcohol can die from CO poisoning before they have symptoms.
- Breathing low levels of CO over a few hours can be just as harmful as breathing high levels for a few minutes.

- If symptoms go away when you leave your home, but come back when you return, there may be a CO in your home.
- Pets will also suffer these symptoms and can serve as a warning.

### Signs and Symptoms

- “Flu-like” symptoms—such as headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach and vomiting
- Sleepiness
- Blurred vision
- Ringing in the ears
- Breathing problems
- Confusion

**Because CO poisoning is more common in the colder months when colds and flu are common, you might mistake CO poisoning for a cold or flu.**

### How to Run a Generator Safely

If your power goes out and you need to use a generator, there are several things you can do to prevent CO poisoning as well as electric shock, electrocution, fire and burns.

- Read and follow the labels and owner’s manual.
- Only use a generator outdoors, more than 20 feet from any window, door or vent.
- Do not use generators in attached garages, basements, or crawlspaces.
- Direct exhaust away from buildings.
- Use a heavy duty, outdoor-rated extension cord that is 20 feet or longer. Replace the cord if it is damaged.
- Make sure the extension cord’s wattage is more than the total wattage of all the appliances that will be connected.
- Plug items directly into the generator or extension cord. Do not plug the generator into a wall outlet.
- Turn off generators and allow to cool before refueling.
- Store fuel in appropriate containers that are labelled, and store outside of living areas.
- Use the generator in dry conditions. If you have to use it in wet conditions, cover the generator with an open, canopy-like structure and use it on a flat, dry surface.
- Always dry your hands before touching a generator.

### For More Information

- Call your local fire department
- List of Vermont-certified technicians – [firesafety.vermont.gov/licensing](https://firesafety.vermont.gov/licensing)
- Vermont Department of Health website – [healthvermont.gov/CO](https://healthvermont.gov/CO)
- Vermont Division of Fire Safety website – [firesafety.vermont.gov](https://firesafety.vermont.gov)