



A Tenants Guide to Carbon Monoxide (CO)

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The silent killer!

You can't see it. You can't taste it. You can't even smell it. But carbon monoxide can kill without warning in just a matter of hours. You are particularly at risk when you are asleep because you cannot recognise the early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning.

It is released when a carbon-containing fuel – such as gas, oil, coal, coke, petrol or wood – doesn't burn fully because not enough air is available. This can happen when appliances such as room and water heaters, fires and cookers have been wrongly installed or poorly maintained, or when a chimney, flue or air vent into the room such as an air brick has been fully or partially blocked. Poor ventilation adds to the problem by allowing CO concentrations to build up. Anyone spending time with faulty appliances will be affected. Accidental exposure to CO kills more than 50 people each year in England and Wales. It can kill without warning, sometimes in a matter of minutes. Low levels that don't kill you can still cause serious harm to your health – by affecting your nervous system or memory, for example – if breathed in over a long time. The poisoning effects of CO can be long-lasting: in patients who suffer severe poisoning

The Symptoms

CO poisoning can be difficult to detect, because its symptoms are the same as those of many other common ailments. For example, you may experience headaches, tiredness, and difficulty thinking clearly and feeling sick. Sometimes it may feel as though you have food poisoning or that you are coming down with flu. You may also notice that others in the same property have similar symptoms and that the symptoms are less severe if you are away from your property – for example, at work or on holiday. Those most vulnerable to the effects of CO poisoning are older people, pregnant women and their babies, children and those with breathing problems or heart disease.

The **symptoms** of mild carbon monoxide poisoning may be similar to those of cold and flu infections or food poisoning and include:

- ✓ headache,
- ✓ nausea,
- ✓ abdominal pain,
- ✓ dizziness,
- ✓ sore throat
- ✓ and dry cough.

In children, the symptoms are similar to those of a stomach upset, with nausea and vomiting.

Unlike flu infections, carbon monoxide poisoning **doesn't cause** a high temperature.

Severe poisoning can result in: fast / irregular heart rate, difficulty breathing, confusion, drowsiness, seizures, loss of consciousness and even death.

If your **pet** suddenly becomes ill or dies unexpectedly (not related to age or an existing condition) you should investigate a possible CO leak. The smaller the animal or person, the faster CO will affect them.



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What should you do if you have these symptoms or think there is a problem ?

- Turn off ALL your cooking and room or water heating appliances that use fuel other than electricity. Open the windows in the room and in other parts of your home to let in fresh air, and move outside. For solid-fuel room or water heaters, fires and cookers, open windows and then carefully turn off the appliance or put out the fire (or allow it to burn itself out) but do not remain in the room.
- See a doctor at once and say that you think you may have CO poisoning. You may be offered a special test for CO poisoning, which could involve measuring CO in a breath sample or a blood sample. You should be aware that CO leaves the body quite quickly, and tests made some hours after your exposure has stopped may not reveal high levels of CO in either your breath or your blood.
- Call a suitably qualified engineer to check all your cooking and room- or water-heating appliances (see 'Further information' on page 10). Your local authority environmental health office may be able to offer advice. If you rent a property, your landlord should be able to assist in resolving the matter.
- Call the **Gas Safe Emergency Freephone Number 0800 111 999**.
- Fit a Carbon monoxide Alarm! by Law your landlord should fit one in any room containing a solid fuel burning appliance.



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