

Mission:

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



Rick Scott
Governor

John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS
State Surgeon General & Secretary

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 23, 2014

Contact: Craig Ackerman
352-629-0137, ext. 2052
Craig.Ackerman@FLHealth.gov

HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE RESIDENTS TO AVOID CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

OCALA—The Florida Department of Health in Marion County urges residents to take precautions to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning as there have been several recent incidents leading to hospitalizations and even deaths in Florida.

Marion County has had its share of problems with CO poisoning in recent years as well. After several years of no deaths in the county, deaths due to CO poisoning occurred in 2012 and 2013.

"With colder weather moving in and extended family in town for the holidays, people may be tempted to find creative ways to heat some spaces in their homes," said Dan Dooley, environmental administrator for the Florida Department of Health in Marion County. "Be sure to use alternative heat sources properly, so your holidays don't turn to tragedy."

Carbon monoxide poisoning is a year round threat, however as temperatures drop, the potential for CO poisonings rise. CO is a highly poisonous gas produced by burning fuels such as gasoline, natural gas, propane, kerosene, charcoal, and wood. CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or partially enclosed spaces. 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.

"Carbon monoxide is a silent poisonous gas that can cause illness and death within minutes of exposure," said Dr. Kendra Goff, State Toxicologist for the Florida Department of Health. "It is invisible, tasteless, odorless and non-irritating, which is why taking precautions is vital and having sufficient working CO alarms in your home is critical. Proper use of generators, portable space heaters or gas grills can protect you and your family from the potential tragedy of an accidental poisoning."

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, propane or kerosene heaters in enclosed spaces, especially sleeping areas.
- Install and use fuel-burning appliances according to manufacturer instructions, the Florida Building Code, and the Florida Fire Prevention Code.
- 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.
- 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 a house according to manufacturer's installation instructions or NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) 720: Standard for the Installation of Carbon Monoxide (CO) Detection and Warning Equipment.
- Install only CO alarms that meet the UL (Underwriter Laboratories) 2034 or the CSA (Canadian Standards Association) 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.

CO poisoning is a reportable disease and all suspect cases in Marion County need to be reported to the Communicable Diseases department at 352-629-0137, ext. 2088, or the Florida Department of Health Bureau of Epidemiology office at 850-245-4401. 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 www.floridahealth.gov/indoorair or call the Radon and Indoor Air Program at 1-800-543-8279.

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

Follow us on Twitter at [@HealthyFla](https://twitter.com/HealthyFla) and on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/HealthyFla). For more information about the Florida Department of Health please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov.

###