

The Public Health Agency is advising everyone to be aware of carbon monoxide poisoning. CO poisoning can be fatal and affect anyone. However, children, older people, pregnant women and people with heart or breathing problems are more vulnerable to its effects.

During the cold weather people across Northern Ireland will be turning up the heating and lighting fires, increasing their risk of CO poisoning. CO is produced when fossil fuels such as gas, coal, oil, wood, petrol and paraffin burn without enough oxygen. It is a colourless, tasteless, odourless gas that is non-irritating, and as a result can be very hard to detect, so people need to be particularly vigilant for the signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Bad weather and snow can also mean gas flues get blocked by ice, causing an increased risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Symptoms include:

- headaches
- nausea and vomiting
- exhaustion
- drowsiness
- dizziness and light-headedness
- 'flu like' symptom
- palpitations
- chest pain
- losing consciousness

Carbon monoxide poisoning can be fatal and can also cause long-term health problems if victims are exposed to low doses over a long period of time. The signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are often mistaken for other illnesses, such as food poisoning or flu – the symptoms can be similar to flu but without a raised temperature. Please look out for these signs and symptoms and consider if carbon monoxide poisoning could be the cause.

Anyone who suspects they may be suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning should immediately turn off all appliances, go outside and seek medical help from a qualified healthcare professional. Appliances should

not be used again until they have been serviced by a registered engineer.

Carbon monoxide poisoning causes a number of deaths and hospital admissions each year. It is vital that we are all vigilant to ensure that we are protected from its dangers. Advice on the risks and measures that can be taken to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning is available online from [nidirect](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/). It is essential that people take care when using appliances and ensure that they are safe and used in properly ventilated spaces.

To minimise the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning the PHA recommends the following:

- install an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm that meets British or European standards (BS Kitemark or EN 50291). These cost as little as £20.00 and can be purchased from large DIY stores and food retail stores. Alarms, however, should not be used as a substitute for regular servicing of appliances;
- have their fossil fuel and wood burning appliances - such as boilers, heaters and cookers - checked by an appropriately registered engineer;
- sweep chimneys and flues every year if you use solid fuel;
- if you are in rented accommodation ask your landlord to provide you with an up-to-date gas safety record. This is a requirement by law and is particularly important for students renting houses and flats;
- keep flues, air vents and grilles clear and ensure rooms are well ventilated.

Further information from the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland can be found at:

<https://www.hseni.gov.uk/topic/carbon-monoxide>

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