

# Carbon Monoxide – The Silent Killer

You can't see it, taste it, or smell it, but it can kill.

More than 50 people in the UK die from Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning every year and 200 people are left seriously ill.\*

## What is CO?

CO is a poisonous gas produced by the incomplete burning of gas and liquid petroleum gas (LPG).

It occurs when a gas appliance has been incorrectly fitted, badly repaired or poorly maintained. It also occurs if flues, chimneys or vents are blocked.

## What does it do to my body?

When you breathe in CO (even small amounts) it gets into your blood stream and prevents your red blood cells from carrying oxygen which can cause your body tissue and cells to die. If inhaled over a long period of time, CO can cause serious harm to health including brain damage, paralysis or even result in death.

\*Figures taken from the NHS.

## Spotting the signs

- If you have a gas cooker the flame should be crisp and blue. Lazy yellow or orange flames mean you need to get your cooker checked
- Dark staining around or on appliances
- Pilot lights that frequently blow out
- Increased condensation visible on windows

## Recognising the symptoms

CO poisoning is difficult to self diagnose as many of the symptoms are shared with common illnesses such as colds and flu or food poisoning.

The main symptoms to look out for are:

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Breathlessness
- Collapse
- Loss of consciousness



## Prevention

- Clamp down on the silent killer by installing an audio CO alarm. You can pick one up from your local DIY store or supermarket for around £15, or alternatively contact your energy supplier
- Have an annual gas safety check and get your appliances serviced by a Gas Safe registered engineer. The Gas Safe Register is the official list of gas engineers who are qualified to work safely and legally on gas appliances. Always check your engineer's ID and that he or she is on the Gas Safe Register. Visit [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk) for more information or call **0800 408 5500**

## What should you do if you suspect CO poisoning?

1. Turn off gas appliances immediately, open doors and windows and leave the property
2. See your doctor immediately or go to hospital and let them know that you suspect CO poisoning. They can do a blood or breath test to check
3. Call the National Gas Emergency Service on **0800 111 999**. A qualified engineer will arrive within two hours, check for gas and make the property safe
4. Get a Gas Safe registered engineer to inspect your gas appliances and flues to see if there is a fault before they carry out the appropriate repairs

**CO doesn't just pose a risk in the home. There are an increasing number of CO related incidents that occur in the great outdoors too.**

### On the water

Larger boats, such as houseboats, sometimes have generators that vent toward the rear of the boat. This venting poses a danger of CO poisoning to people on the rear swim deck or water platform. It's important to make sure that any gasoline-powered engines on boats, including onboard generators are kept in good condition and checked regularly.

### Camping and barbecues

CO is produced when charcoal, gas or petrol burns incompletely. Barbecues can produce CO even when they are working well and even when the flames have gone out smouldering coals can still kill. Although you may be tempted to put your barbecue in your tent to keep you warm, DON'T!

**It might not be the first thing that you think of but if you're heading on a boat trip or camping holiday, make sure you pack a CO alarm. It could be a life saver.**

**Remember** if you smell gas or suspect CO poisoning call the **National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999**.

All calls are free and may be recorded for training purposes.

