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Silent killer: Don't let carbon monoxide sneak into your home

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AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Silent killer: Don't let carbon monoxide sneak into your home

It's time to crank up the heat, get some logs in the fireplace and simmer some soup on the stove. But while you are warming yourself and your home, it is important not to let in an unwanted intruder: carbon monoxide.

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can enter homes through leaky chimneys, furnaces, gas water heaters, wood stoves, gas stoves, fireplaces, ovens, clothes dryers, vehicles through the garage door and cigarette smoke (first- or secondhand). Carbon monoxide poisoning stops the body from transporting oxygen properly, resulting in headaches, nausea, personality changes, confusion, memory loss, fainting and even death.

About 15,000 people visit emergency rooms and 500 die each year due to unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning, according to 2006 statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Home heating systems are the most common route of carbon monoxide poisoning.

The following tips can help keep your family safe (but still warm) this year.

- Install carbon monoxide detectors, particularly near bedrooms. Check batteries and test all alarms and detectors regularly to ensure proper functioning.
- Respond promptly when a carbon monoxide detector alarm sounds. Children may already be showing symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning by the time the alarm goes off.

- Leave your home immediately if you suspect high levels of carbon monoxide.
- Have your furnace, fireplace, chimney and heaters inspected each year to ensure they are working properly.
- Never leave your car idling in the garage, even if the garage door is open.
- Use an exhaust fan vented outside over gas stoves.
- Do not use charcoal grills, kerosene heaters or portable stoves indoors.
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation and use of heating devices.
- If possible, keep a window cracked open while a fire is burning in the fireplace.
- Use dry and well-aged wood in fireplaces. Wet or green wood causes more smoke and contributes to smoke buildup in the chimney.

— Hilary Rasch



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