

you can't **smell it**

you can't **see it** and

**it can kill!**



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

# What?

Carbon Monoxide - the 'silent killer'

Despite widespread publicity, it has been reported that in the UK between 10 and 20 people die each year in their homes from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning.

# How?

By starving the cells of oxygen and poisoning the body.

# When?

By burning any carbon based fuel e.g. gas, coal, coke, oil, petrol, wood, etc without enough ventilation.

The fuels will still burn but rather than producing carbon dioxide they produce potentially lethal carbon monoxide.

# Who?

Tragically, many young people in student accommodation.

But it can affect anyone who is burning carbon based fuel in an enclosed area.

It can affect old and new properties.

# What are the symptoms?

The effects are like everyday illnesses so can be difficult to detect, but may include:

- Headache, dizziness and nausea
- Drowsiness **and** a feeling of weakness.



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# Do not ignore these symptoms if:

- Other people in the same building have similar problems;
- You've recently moved into the building;
- You've had a new appliance fitted e.g. heating or a cooker;
- You've had work carried out that might affect ventilation e.g. double glazing;
- You feel better when out of the building; or
- You've recently switched the heating on.

## **If affected, what action do I take?**

- Go into the fresh air.
- Seek medical attention immediately.
- Do not use the appliance until it has been examined by a Gas Safe registered engineer.

## **What can I do to prevent Carbon Monoxide poisoning?**

### **Keep ventilated**

- Ensure there is enough oxygen wherever fuel is being burnt.
- Homes are changing, for example, with double glazing, so we don't have 'natural' draughts and may need ventilation fitted. That can be with a flue leading outside, or into an existing opening such as a chimney.

## **Keep flues clear**

- External flues may be blocked by vegetation growing over the outlet, or debris and birds nests may block a chimney.
- Sometimes, venting of gases is not possible e.g. in a garage. In these circumstances a through-flow of air is essential to prevent gas building up.

## **Keep serviced - old and new appliances**

- Services should include a 'venting of gases' check. For gas appliances, engineers must be Gas Safe registered.
- Appliances not used for a long time should be serviced before use.

## **Keep safe - install detectors with an audible alarm**

- Audible carbon monoxide detectors are a valuable safety precaution and can be purchased from DIY Stores, Supermarkets and other reputable high street retailers.
- Make sure they are British or European standard approved.

# What help can I get?

- Manufacturers of boilers and fires provide clear guidance as to ventilation and flue requirements and all new installations should comply with these.
- It is vital that all carbon fuel-burning appliances are used in accordance with the manufacturers' recommendations, and fitted and serviced by an accredited engineer.
- Universities and colleges sometimes have carbon monoxide detectors available on loan from Safety Offices.
- Landlords have a responsibility to ensure that all appliances are safe, but tenants must also ask if appliances are safe before moving in.

## Flooding:

- Floodwater and the build up of silt or debris can affect ventilation and cause gas to build up. Get checked by an accredited engineer.
- Don't use indoor camping stoves or other gasoline, propane or natural gas devices that are meant for outdoor use.

Further information on gas safety and the risks to health is available from a number of sources.

HSE's Gas Safety Advice line is available on **0800 300 363**

For health issues and symptoms:  
NHS Direct Wales **0845 4647** or  
**[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)**

To find a Gas Safe-registered gas installer visit  
Gas Safe Register website at: **[www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)**  
or call **0800 408 5500**

For suspected gas leaks,  
contact the National Gas Emergency Service **0800 111 999**

Support and advice is also available from CO-Awareness  
**0771 589 9216** E-mail: [coawareness@covictim.org](mailto:coawareness@covictim.org).

Further information on flooding can be found at:  
**[www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/43887](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/43887)**

This factsheet has been published by the Welsh Assembly Government as part of its response to Health Challenge Wales, which is about better health and wellbeing in Wales. If you would like to find out more about Health Challenge Wales, visit **[www.healthchallengewales.org](http://www.healthchallengewales.org)** or phone us on **0845 606 4050**.

