

## **Adventist Healthcare: Health Tip of the Week**

### **CO Poisoning**

There are over 40,000 emergency department visits for carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning every year in the United States. CO is the most commonly encountered poison in the environment and is responsible for more recent deaths than any other single poison.

CO is produced whenever any fuel such as gas, oil, kerosene, wood or charcoal is burned. Hundreds of people die from CO poisoning caused by malfunctioning or improperly used fuel-burning appliances. Even more die from CO produced by idling cars. It has no color, taste or odor and it doesn't irritate the skin. Red blood cells pick up CO quicker than oxygen. If there is a lot of CO in the air, your body may replace oxygen in your blood with CO.

### **Symptoms**

Fetuses, infants, elderly people and those with anemia or a history of heart or respiratory disease can be especially susceptible. Some studies found that 15-40 percent of survivors suffered immediate or delayed neuropsychological deficit.

- \* Low Levels can cause shortness of breath, mild nausea, and headaches. Low levels may have long-term effects on your health.
- \* Moderate Levels can cause severe headaches, dizziness, mental confusion, nausea and faintness. You can die if these levels persist for a long period of time.
- \* High Levels can kill a person in minutes.

### **Prevention**

- \* The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission advises you install CO detectors that meet UL standards near bedrooms.
- \* Don't idle your car in a garage even if the garage door is open. Fumes build-up very quickly.
- \* Any heater that burns fuel such as your oil or gas furnace, gas water heater, portable butane or gas heater, fireplaces, wood stoves and kerosene space heaters should be inspected every year.
- \* Don't sleep in any room with an unvented gas or kerosene space heater.
- \* Never run a generator in an enclosed area such as a basement or outside a window where the exhaust could blow indoors.
- \* Be sure to clear any snow out of your car's tailpipe.
- \* Don't use a charcoal grill indoors even in a fireplace.
- \* Make sure flues and chimneys are connected, in good condition and not blocked.
- \* Don't use gasoline-powered engines (snow blowers, small engines, etc.) in enclosed spaces.

If you suspect CO poisoning, it is important to get fresh air immediately and go to an emergency room. It can often be diagnosed by a blood test soon after exposure.

Sources: EPA, CDC, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, CO.headquarters.com and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.