



NEWS RELEASE

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KEY POINTS FOR MEDIA:

- First report of its kind details CO exposures over five-year period
- CO exposures can happen any time of the year
- Report will strengthen prevention and awareness efforts to reduce the thousands of CO incidents each year in Illinois

IDPH Releases Carbon Monoxide Surveillance Report

Comprehensive study details unintentional CO exposures resulting in hospital visits and deaths, reminds public of lifesaving precautions

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has issued its [first-ever carbon monoxide surveillance report](#), detailing all known unintentional carbon monoxide (CO) exposures in the state from 2019-2023. Data from the report will help state and local officials work on targeted public information and education efforts and other interventions to help Illinoisans avoid emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and deaths resulting from carbon monoxide exposure.

“Carbon monoxide poisoning can be a silent killer, but it is also completely preventable,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “Simple steps like installing and maintaining carbon monoxide alarms and checking appliances can save lives. This first-ever report gives us the tools and strategies to act now, protecting Illinois families and preventing these tragedies before they happen.”

“In 2024, Illinois fire departments responded to 9,860 carbon monoxide-related calls across our state. These numbers serve as a powerful reminder that carbon monoxide remains a serious and potentially deadly threat in our homes. The good news is that prevention is simple working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms save lives,” said Illinois State Fire Marshal Michele Pankow. “Regularly testing your alarms, checking expiration dates, and replacing units that are broken or outdated is your strongest line of defense against accidental carbon monoxide poisoning or worse.”

Among the key findings in the report:

- Over the five years of the study, carbon monoxide exposures resulted in an average of 940 emergency department (ED) visits, 126 hospital admissions, and nearly 57 deaths annually in Illinois.
- While unintentional CO exposures are most common during cold weather months from October to March, they can and do happen at any time of the year.
- Among the most common sources of unintentional carbon monoxide exposures are fire and smoke; malfunctioning or improperly ventilated furnaces, gas stoves, water heaters, or other appliances; exhaust from vehicles running in garages or other enclosed spaces; generators operating indoors

without proper ventilation or operating outdoors too close to open windows; and gas-powered tools like saws or power washers being operated indoors or in unventilated spaces.

- Fire departments responded to more than 50,000 total carbon monoxide incidents statewide in the five-year period, with 95% of them occurring in residential settings. Commercial and business locations accounted for 2.4% of total reports, followed by public/government locations, healthcare and assisted living facilities, and institutional/educational locations.
- CO incidents were more likely to occur on Sunday than any other day of the week, and more likely to happen in the evening hours (6pm-midnight). Both findings reflect times when people were more likely to be home and using furnaces, appliances, or other potential sources of carbon monoxide.
- In 81% of all incidents, there was no data provided on whether a working carbon monoxide detector was in place at the site of the exposure. Of the remaining 19% of incident reports, six percent indicated that residents were alerted to the issue by a working CO detector; one percent indicated that no working detector was in place; and 12% said the CO detector status was “unknown.” The report says this shows the need for more consistent and complete reporting practices.

As stated in the report, “The data shows that carbon monoxide exposure is not a rare or isolated threat. It is happening every day, affecting residents of all ages, in homes across every part of Illinois.... This report is more than a set of statistics; it is a call to action.” IDPH will use the report to support a number of initiatives aimed at improving awareness and prevention of carbon monoxide exposures, including:

- Strengthening and supporting public information campaigns year-round, and especially during high-risk seasons
- Supporting local health departments and other community partners around the state with data that will help them tailor outreach and prevention efforts in the most impacted communities
- Encouraging awareness, use, and maintenance of carbon monoxide detectors, as well as encouraging regular inspection and maintenance of furnaces and other gas-powered appliances
- Strengthening interagency coordination, including first responders, to identify and address high-risk settings before exposures occur, and
- Promoting continued CO surveillance efforts and better reporting on the presence and use of CO detectors to highlight their importance.

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