



222 S. Riverside Plaza Ph 312.906.6136
Suite 1900 Fax 312.627.8006
Chicago, IL 60606 TDD 312.906.6185
www.illinoispoisoncenter.org

For Immediate Release

Contact: Elizabeth Chmurak
312-906-6146
echmurak@ilpoison.org

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The Silent Killer Creeps Up in the Winter Months

Illinois Poison Center Warns About the Dangers of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

(Chicago) – Carbon monoxide poisoning unleashes during the cooler months as furnaces are turned up. The “silent killer” earned its name because it is an odorless, colorless and tasteless gas that kills about 500 people in the United States each year and nearly 15,000 people require emergency care. During the winter months in 2008, the Illinois Poison Center hotline handled more than 800 carbon monoxide poisonings.

“Carbon monoxide can kill you even before you realize it’s in your home,” says Michael Wahl, MD, managing medical director of the Illinois Poison Center. “It’s important for a professional to inspect your furnace annually and for you to test the CO detectors in your home monthly, it could save your life.”

Common sources of carbon monoxide are furnaces, space heaters, gas stoves, cars and charcoal grills. Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning mimic flu-like symptoms including: headache, nausea, vomiting and dizziness. More serious symptoms are drowsiness, confusion and heart irregularities, which may lead to convulsions, unconsciousness, brain damage and even death.

Tips to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Install carbon monoxide detectors on every floor of your home
- Hire a trained professional to inspect, clean and tune-up furnaces, vents and chimneys annually
- Never heat your home with a gas oven or stove
- Turn off space heaters while sleeping
- Never leave the car running in the garage, even if the garage door is open
- After a CO alarm goes off, move to fresh air, either outside or to an open window, account for every household member and call the Illinois Poison Center 1-800-222-1222. If someone is having difficulty breathing call 911 immediately.

*For more information about carbon monoxide poisoning log onto: www.illinoispoisoncenter.org or call the toll free Illinois Poison Help hotline at 1-800-222-1222.

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The IPC is the only certified, regional poison center in Illinois, serving more than 12 million residents in 102 counties – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – via a national, toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222.

The toll-free hot line will connect callers with a local poison center from anywhere in the United States. Staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers, the IPC provides poison prevention information and treatment advice to the public and health care professionals on alcohol and drug misuse, medication problems, bites and stings, occupational accidents and other poisonings. The Illinois Poison Center is a program of the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, a membership and service organization dedicated to helping members care for their communities through access to health care and improved delivery of services.