



VITALS

A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

Mike Szczygiel (Segal)
888-969-8033
meszczygiel@thomcoins.com

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning: A Reminder



On September 19, 2008, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published "Clinical Guidance for Carbon Monoxide (CO) Poisoning After a Disaster". CO kills about 6,000 Americans and sends another 40,000 to 50,000 to the hospital annually. Although CO is the number one cause of poisoning in industrialized countries, its toxicity is easily misdiagnosed because initial symptoms are vague. In fact, some sources list as many as 30 symptoms attributable to CO exposure.

If you walk into a home that has lost power due to a storm, where a charcoal fire has been used, and there are 8 people with red skin, headaches and altered mental status, you'll probably think of CO and not a one house flu epidemic. But what if there is one person with flu-like symptoms? If there has been a power outage or the person decided to warm up the house with a heat source to supplement the furnace, would you think about CO? What are sources of CO?

CO is a product of combustion. Alternate sources of energy such as generators, grills, camp stoves, as well as, gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal devices should never be used in a home, basement, garage or camper. They should not be used by open windows or window air conditioner units. Other sources of CO include motor vehicles, fires, boats, power washers and other gas powered tools.

People at particular risk for CO poisoning include: babies, children, those with chronic heart, respiratory or blood diseases and pregnant women. The developing fetus is at particular risk because fetal hemoglobin (HgbF) has a higher affinity for both oxygen and CO than adult hemoglobin (HgbA). In other words, the baby can be much sicker than the mother.

Poster Pointers

Safe Following
Distance:
The Four Second Rule

Nicer weather has a tendency for everybody to drive faster. It's a good time to think about what it takes to create a safe following distance. Another way of looking at this is, "If the driver in front of me does something exceedingly and unexpectedly stupid, do I have enough time to perceive, react and avoid crashing into something?" Review "Avoiding Rear-End Collisions" in "Arrive Alive Do No Harm".

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