

**Communicable Disease Epidemiology
and Immunization Section**

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**Health Alert:
Increased Risk of Accidental Carbon Monoxide Poisoning
Due to Extreme Winter Weather
November 22, 2010**

Action requested:

- **Be alert for symptoms of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. Common symptoms include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, dyspnea, chest pain, and confusion. Severe cases may have loss of consciousness, metabolic acidosis and death.**
- **Report confirmed and suspected individual cases and clusters of accidental weather-related CO poisoning immediately to Public Health**
 - **Suspected case: A physician diagnosis of CO poisoning based on signs, symptoms and history of accidental exposure to a source of CO as a result of extreme winter weather (e.g. cold temperatures and/or power outages) or a link to a confirmed case.**
 - **Confirmed case: A case that fulfills the above criteria and has an elevated venous or arterial carboxyhemoglobin concentration (>5% in nonsmokers, or >10% in smokers - typical in smokers is 6%-10%).**
- **During business hours, report by calling (206) 296-4774. After hours call the same number - press “1” and tell the operator you wish to report a case of accidental CO poisoning to the Public Health Duty Officer.**

Background

Today the National Weather Service issued a Winter Storm Warning for snow and variable winds with gusts up to 40 mph in the Seattle/Tacoma/Everett metro areas. Severe cold weather and associated power outages increase the risk that people will improperly use charcoal or propane grills for indoor heat or cooking, or use gasoline or propane power generators without adequate ventilation. Immigrants may be at particular risk because of cooking and heating practices in their home countries and unfamiliarity with the risks of CO poisoning.

Resources

- Clinical guidance on diagnosis and management of CO intoxication is available 24/7 through the Washington Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.
- Online clinical guidance resources are available on the CDC website at http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/co_guidance.asp
- Consultation regarding management of severe CO intoxication is available through the Virginia Mason Hyperbaric Medicine program, call 206-583-6450 to reach the hyperbaric medicine physician on-call.
- Shelter information is available from the King County Emergency Coordination Center at 296-3830.
- Patient information on CO poisoning including pictograms and fact sheets in multiple languages is available at: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/disaster/carbon-monoxide.aspx>