

PREPARE PRACTICE PROTECT

IMPROVING CARBON MONOXIDE SAFETY
IN HEALTH AND CARE SERVICES

Top tips for individual professionals and practitioners



Protect yourself at work by:

- 1** Learning the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, the potential sources of carbon monoxide in the home, and what to do if a carbon monoxide alarm sounds or if you suspect carbon monoxide exposure has occurred.
- 2** Save the Gas Emergency Number on to your phone so you are prepared: 0800 111 999.
- 3** Familiarise yourself with carbon monoxide alarms where possible, both at home and at work. Check the location, press to test, and check the expiry date.
- 4** Inform tenants about carbon monoxide and how to stay safe with regular appliance servicing and by installing alarms.
- 5** Make sure you know the protocols for each client if emergency evacuation is required. Seek advice from your employer for support if required.



Community working

- 1** Reporting safety risks: If you see unsafe housing or a concerning indoor environment, it is advisable to take a short video or some photographs to record this so it can be reported effectively (with resident permission).
- 2** It might be helpful to refer clients and patients to the Priority Services Register (PSR) as a standard part of signing them up to a service or taking their details, as people with health needs can access greater support with utilities if on this register.
- 3** Lone working: make sure you have someone to call on entry/exit if you are visiting an empty building or a high-risk environment. Your employer may have a policy on this, or you can ask a friend or colleague to buddy up with you. Make sure you know what to do if the call doesn't come within a certain time-frame.
- 4** Those working in maternity: continue to take breath readings for carbon monoxide once the baby has been born. Carbon monoxide exposure may still be a risk from environmental sources; as mother and baby tend to share the same environment carbon monoxide in the mother could be a warning for the child being exposed.



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Top tips for employers

Employers, managers, and service providers can get ahead through:



Training

Support employees to undertake regular training in carbon monoxide safety, ideally in workshops run by external organisations (such as the Fire and Rescue Service) that take place within working hours. Knowledge should be tested, and training should be refreshed each year. See example provider: Think CO | Gas Safe Charity (gassafecharity.org.uk)



Protocols

- 1 Establish emergency protocols and procedures for responding to suspected carbon monoxide or an alarm activation. Clinical staff should be made aware of the National Poisons Information Service (NPIS), which they can contact for advice if carbon monoxide exposure is suspected.

- 2 Employers of community-based staff: Protocols for responding to a carbon monoxide alarm will need to take consideration of the needs of individual clients; for example there may be mobility/access/lifting considerations where patients require two people or supportive equipment to move them. These must be developed and practiced by staff.



Practices

- 1 Embed carbon monoxide safety within existing fire safety practices and training and ensure these are carried out regularly
- 2 Celebrate staff who go above and beyond in safe practice and promote carbon monoxide safety with clients. Share any positive case studies from this, for example where a member of staff has identified a potential exposure and has taken correct action.

- 3 Employers of community-based staff: Set up regular carbon monoxide alarm testing schedules that are signed off.
- 4 Employers of community-based staff: Consider providing staff with personal equipment to detect carbon monoxide, such as a portable carbon monoxide alarm or a Personal Atmosphere Monitor in case they are visiting a property without any alarms installed.



Guidance & advice

Share guidance and advice on carbon monoxide safety with staff from reputable sources, for example a professional body or regulator. See example from the Royal College of Nursing: Carbon monoxide poisoning: what nursing staff need to know.^A



Support

It may be beneficial to seek out connections with Home Improvement Agencies (via the local authority), Fire and Rescue Services, and any other supportive or charitable housing improvement services, to understand the services they can offer and how the referral processes work. If possible, ask a representative from a supportive organisation to attend an internal meeting with staff to outline the referrals process and what services are available.