

Carbon Monoxide Diagnostic Algorithm



Health Protection Agency

Air Pollution Unit

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Dear Colleague,

Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning is an important problem. Often, we are only reminded about the dangers of exposure to carbon monoxide when tragedies occur: these should be prevented. The number of people who may be suffering from the effects of chronic low level exposure to carbon monoxide is also a cause for concern and needs to be reduced. The diagnosis of carbon monoxide poisoning can be difficult, but it is very important because if it is missed then not only the patient, but his or her family may continue to be exposed to this poisonous gas.

The Health Protection Agency has produced a diagnostic algorithm (produced in consultation with the National Poisons Information Service, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the College of Emergency Medicine and the Department of Health and supported by Gas Safe RegisterTM¹) to help you to diagnose carbon monoxide poisoning and organise help for your patients. The algorithm complements the NHS patient information leaflet together with a joint letter from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Nursing Officer on carbon monoxide (see www.dh.gov.uk/cmo).

How the Diagnostic Algorithm will help you. It will:

- help you to confirm your diagnosis of acute or chronic carbon monoxide poisoning
- tell you about the specialised assistance available via TOXBASE, the National Poisons Information Service and your local Health Protection Unit (HPU). Your local HPU will co-ordinate a multi-service (eg, Environmental Health, Health and Safety, Social Services) response to protect your patient, and, if necessary, other people who may have been affected, and provide guidance.
- remind you that you should follow-up your patient or patients because of the delayed health effects of carbon monoxide poisoning which sometimes occur.

We are grateful for your assistance and hope that the information provided will be helpful. We would welcome any feedback you may have on the algorithm. Please contact us on:

COfeedback@hpa.org.uk

Thank you.

¹ Gas Safe RegisterTM. The new hallmark for gas safety in Great Britain from April 2009. www.GasSafeRegister.co.uk.