



PROTECT YOUR PETS

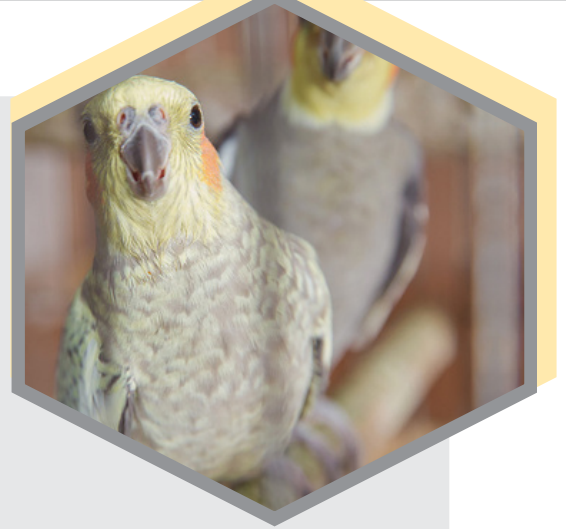
Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Seventy percent of households in the U.S. have a pet, equating to 90.5 million homes, according to a 2021-2022 National Pet Owners Survey conducted by the American Pet Products Association. In the first year in which this survey was conducted (1988), only 56% of households owned a pet.¹

With so many pets in our homes now, it is critical to ensure their health and safety. We all know that we should feed them well, provide them with plenty of attention, and keep them safe from dangers, such as traffic. However, many pet owners are unaware that pets may be at risk of serious injury due to an invisible threat: carbon monoxide (CO).

While all humans and animals are at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning in their homes, pets are particularly susceptible to the negative effects of carbon monoxide due to their smaller body size and behavior. Further, home carbon monoxide detector alarm standards are designed to save human lives, not animal lives, putting pets at significant risk of serious injury or death due to carbon monoxide poisoning.

“ Unfortunately, home CO detectors in the US are designed to be human life-saving devices, not pet life-saving devices. ”



One Family's Story

On Christmas Day in 2000, a family of four in Pinckneyville, Illinois found their pet parakeets—Penelope and Feathery—dead in their cages. The children, six and nine years old, were devastated, while their parents were concerned. The birds had been singing along with birds on television a few hours before and had shown no signs of illness.

While the father dug a hole in the backyard to bury the birds, the mother spoke to a friend on the phone. The friend wondered if maybe the pet birds had suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning. The mother grew concerned and decided to call 911.

When city workers responded, they found a small and slow leak in a line near their basement furnace exhaust. Toxic carbon monoxide fumes had vented into the dining room through air ducts from the basement, right to where the birds' cage was located.

The family was perplexed—they had carbon monoxide detectors installed in their home. Why had the alarms not gone off?

As the Pinckneyville family learned that night, carbon monoxide can accumulate in homes at low levels that are not high enough to trigger home carbon monoxide alarms. Because pets' bodies process carbon monoxide differently than humans, they are particularly susceptible to low levels of carbon monoxide. As a result, low levels of CO can be fatal to birds and other pets without being fatal to humans.²



Birds

- Birds are especially susceptible to the negative effects of CO
- They have a small body size, high metabolism, and high breathing rate

Signs of CO poisoning in birds³

- Swaying
- Weakness
- Death
- Falling
- Unconsciousness

DID YOU KNOW?

Canaries were once used to detect dangerous levels of carbon monoxide and other toxic gases in coal mines. If the canaries stopped singing, coal miners knew something was wrong.



Cats

- Small body size makes them more susceptible to carbon monoxide poisoning than humans
- Their behavior also raises their risk of CO poisoning, such as curling up next to heaters or fireplaces

Signs of CO poisoning in cats⁴

- Sleepiness
- Erratic behavior
- Seizures
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Unconsciousness
- Vomiting
- Bright red nostrils, lips and ears
- Death
- Difficulty breathing

A Cat Named Boo

In 2018, a family cat named Boo alerted a family living in Green Township, Ohio of a carbon monoxide leak in their home. In the middle of the night, Boo began meowing so loudly that he woke the entire family up. When the family awoke, they realized they felt dizzy. Around the same time, Boo fell down and became unconscious. When one of Boo's owners, Ariana, got out of bed, she, too, fell unconscious. Other family members helped Ariana and Boo get out of the house to fresh air.



After calling 911, the responding fire crew detected potentially lethal levels of carbon monoxide in the home caused by a boiler that fed the home's baseboard heating system. Without the warning from Boo, the family could have been even more seriously injured from the carbon monoxide.⁵



Dogs

Like other pets, dogs are generally affected by carbon monoxide sooner than humans. Often, dogs are the first to notify their owners of dangerous CO levels in a house due to their erratic behavior.

Signs of CO poisoning in dogs⁶

- Panting
- Erratic Behavior
- Stumbling
- Yawning
- Sleepiness
- Unconsciousness
- Tail Tucking
- Vomiting
- Death
- Sweaty Paws
- Weakness

A Dog Named Rascal

In February 2020, a dog named Rascal alerted a family in Zeeland, Michigan of a CO leak in their home. As the dog's owner, Diane Smith, explained in a news release, "he just collapsed, so, I gave him some goldfish crackers, and he wanted nothing to do with that, which was unusual."



Though the family brought Rascal to the vet, the vet did not find any signs of illness, so they brought Rascal back home. Shortly after, Rascal began to act strangely again. After calling a friend who suggested it might be carbon monoxide poisoning, they brought Rascal outside, where he began to act normal again.

After calling a technician, the Smith family discovered that their furnace had a low-level carbon monoxide leak. The levels were low enough to affect Rascal but not enough to cause noticeable symptoms in Smith and her husband. The CO levels were also low enough that they did not cause their home CO detectors to alarm.⁷

Steps you should take if you suspect your pet is suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning⁸

- ▶ The first step you should take if you suspect CO poisoning in your pet is to remove your entire family (including your pet) from your home.
- ▶ Once you and your pet are away from the source of CO, you should call 911, your fire department, or a utility company to check for CO leaks in your home.
- ▶ You should also contact your veterinarian immediately and/or bring your pet to an emergency veterinary hospital.
- ▶ When you arrive at your veterinarian's office, they will likely take a blood sample and run other diagnostic tests. They may also give your pet oxygen therapy and fluids. Your vet will be able to instruct you on what steps to take next.
- ▶ You and your pet should not return home until your home has been checked for CO leaks by a qualified professional.
- ▶ While your pet recovers, you should keep them as calm and relaxed as possible and monitor them for any ongoing symptoms until they have completely recovered.
- ▶ If you notice any ongoing or new symptoms while your pet is recovering, you should call your vet.

How to protect your pet from CO poisoning

To protect your pet from carbon monoxide poisoning, you should follow all of the preventative measures mentioned in previous sections. You should also monitor your pet for abnormal behaviors. To protect your pets from significant illness due to carbon monoxide exposure, you should consider purchasing carbon monoxide detectors that are as sensitive as possible. Keep in mind that, according to US home CO detector alarm standards, **most home CO detectors will not alarm at levels less than 70 ppm.**⁹ This level of carbon monoxide has the potential to be fatal in pets, since pets are more susceptible to the negative effects of carbon monoxide than humans.

References

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How You Can Help!



Protect Your Pet from CO Poisoning

Keep in mind that most home CO detectors will not alarm at levels lower than 70 ppm. This level of carbon monoxide has the potential to be fatal in pets, since pets are more susceptible to the negative effects of carbon monoxide than humans. Consider purchasing CO detectors that are as sensitive as possible and always monitor your pet for abnormal behaviors.

Support CO Awareness

The mission of the National Carbon Monoxide Awareness Association (NCOAA) is to drive a comprehensive conversation on the public health crisis of chronic and acute carbon monoxide poisoning. The organization is focused on eradicating carbon monoxide poisoning and helping carbon monoxide poisoning survivors recover to lead happy, healthy, and productive lives. You can be part of the solution while helping prevent senseless CO injuries and deaths by making a gift to NCOAA.

Supporting NCOAA is easy!

- Make a secure online donation [here](#)
- Mail your contribution to NCOAA at:

6855 Oakhills Drive
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48301
- To make a donation by phone or to arrange an in-kind donation in support of our mission, contact Charon McNabb at 248.417.5185 or via email at cmcnabb@ncoaa.us