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IAEM warns the public about the increased risks of Carbon Monoxide poisoning during current severe weather

The current record cold temperatures have prompted the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine to warn the public about the greatly increased risk of Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning. CO is produced by faulty or poorly ventilated heating systems or when potentially toxic substances are burnt in lieu of 'normal' fuel. CO is an insidious poison and has been responsible for a significant number of deaths in Ireland in recent years. Given the current severe weather and people's understandable need to keep warm, there is now a much greater risk of such untoward events occurring.

Unfortunately the symptoms of CO poisoning are non-specific and include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting and confusion. Particular concern should be raised if more than one person living in the same location develops such symptoms or when the symptoms improve on vacating the home but return on re-entering. Where these occur in an environment where a heating system is in use, urgent medical attention should be sought outside the home and a certified, trained, heating expert should urgently check the heating system.

In view of the dangers of CO poisoning, it is imperative that heating systems are adequately maintained, in particular to ensure that they are appropriately ventilated. Further information is available at www.carbonmonoxide.ie.

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