

WELSH HEALTH CIRCULAR



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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STATUS: ACTION

CATEGORY: HEALTH PROFESSIONAL LETTER

Title: Raising Awareness of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning and Action Required by Health Professionals

Date of Expiry / Review: N/A

For Action by:

Doctors
Pharmacists
NHS Direct
LHB Chief Executives
LHB Medical Directors
LHB Nurse Executive Directors
Chief Executive Velindre NHS Trust
Chief Executive Ambulance NHS Trust

For Information To:

LA Chief Executives
LA Directors of Public Protection
WLGA Chief Executive
PHW Chief Executive
Providers of Social Housing

Action required:

See section headed "Advice and Action Required"

Sender:

Chief Medical Officer and Chief Nursing Officer

HSSG Welsh Government Contact(s) :

Chris Brereton, Chief Environmental Health Officer, Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ
Chris.brereton@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Telephone: 03000 253618

Enclosure(s): Joint letter from CMO and CNO and Algorithm

Dear colleagues,

As we move into the winter season and heating systems come back into regular use, we believe it is important to remind health professionals about the risks of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

CO poisoning places an avoidable burden on health and health services in Wales. It can be both an acute life threatening problem and present insidiously with difficult to recognise symptoms and signs.

Symptoms

Symptoms of CO poisoning can be vague and unspecific but include headache (as the most common symptom), tiredness, nausea, vomiting, vertigo, dizziness, cognitive impairment, long term neurological damage, convulsions, unconsciousness and death. Chronic low level CO poisoning may be confused with other illnesses such as influenza and food poisoning.

CO poisoning is more likely in those patients presenting after midnight or in the early morning, and in those who also had syncope. Risks to health from exposure to CO are more common in the winter months when malfunctioning heating appliances are used.

Advice and Action Required

It is important to remember that the source of any case of CO poisoning must be identified to prevent more harm. CO poisoning may affect other people living at home or those in neighbouring homes. If you are treating a case, or suspected case, of CO poisoning you have a responsibility to inform Public Health Wales' Environmental Health Protection Team on **0300 003 0032** or out of office hours via ambulance control (see algorithm at ANNEX A - <http://www.publichealthwales.org/environmental-CO-healthcare-algorithm>), just as you would if you were treating a case of infectious disease. The algorithm attached to this circular can be printed off and gives more advice on what to do if you treat a case of CO poisoning.

Further advice on investigations for CO poisoning can be obtained from TOXBASE (www.toxbase.org) or the National Poisons Information Service (NPIS) (Telephone 0344 892 0111).

Further information

Further information can be found on the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales websites:

<http://gov.wales/topics/health/protection/environmental/carbon/?lang=en>

<http://howis.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/39069>

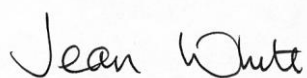
Yours faithfully



DR FRANK ATHERTON

Prif Swyddog Meddygol/Cyfarwyddwr Meddygol, GIG Cymru

Chief Medical Officer/Medical Director NHS Wales



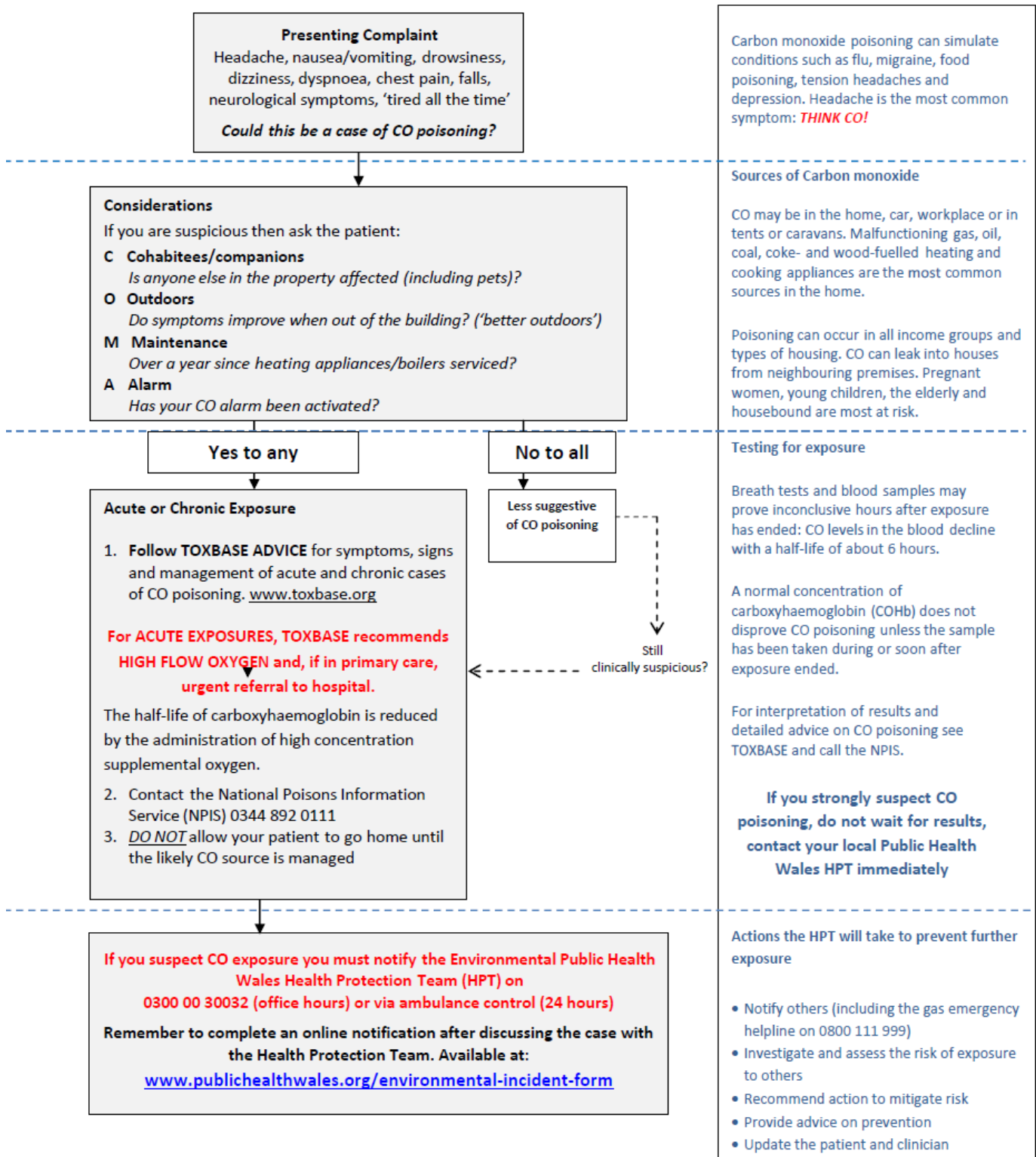
PROFESSOR JEAN WHITE CBE

Prif Swyddog Nyrsio/Cyfarwyddwr Nyrs GIG Cymru

Chief Nursing Officer/Nurse Director NHS Wales

Annex A

Suspected carbon monoxide (CO) exposure: a guide for use in hospital Emergency Departments and primary care settings



Clinical follow-up is important as further consequences of chronic exposure to CO may be delayed, or mild symptoms may persist, multiply or intensify.

Recommend the purchase of an approved audible CO alarm (EN50291 compliant) for installation in the home.