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Carbon monoxide almost kills 7

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Carbon Monoxide Almost Kills 7

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Wisconsin

By Sarah Thomsen

St. Mary's Hospital in Green Bay says it usually sees one case of carbon monoxide poisoning each year. Just this week, doctors and nurses treated three cases, including two large families.

One mother credits carbon monoxide detectors with saving their lives. Wednesday night, just before 11 o'clock, Brigid Molony thought she was hearing strange voices.

"I thought, who's up? Who's talking? Because most of the kids were in bed."

What she was hearing was a carbon monoxide detector she didn't even know she had. The electronic voice warned her to get out of her new house.

Doctors at St. Mary's Hospital say this time of year when people are turning on their furnaces, you shouldn't automatically suspect you have the flu if you feel sick.

Signs of CO poisoning include:

- * Fatigue
- * Headache
- * Rapid pulse
- * Nausea
- * Difficulty staying awake

Doctors say the longer a person is exposed to carbon monoxide the harder it is for that person to realize they're sick.

But Dr. Ken Hujet of Prevea Internal Medicine said, "People should have a high degree of suspicion, they should realize when several family members are sick in the same way, that's one of the things to consider."

At first, Brigid thought the detector was malfunctioning. But then, "About ten minutes later, this one went off."

So she woke up the kids, who were sleeping through the detectors going off right outside their bedrooms. They opened the doors and windows and all seven family members got out.

"That's the only thing that saved our lives," Molony said. "We're all still breathing, but you don't realize you're breathing poison."

Even after the doors and windows were open for half an hour after the detectors went off, the fire department recorded a reading of 122 in the basement -- where the family had been sitting.

The furnace company says a level of "2" is too high.

"The furnace man said, 'At that level, you guys would have gone to bed and wouldn't wake up,'" Molony said.

She now realizes the severe headaches and fatigue she felt all week weren't the flu but signs she was slowly being poisoned and didn't know it -- not until her carbon monoxide detector went off.

"This would have been a different story: 'Family of seven dead.'"