Predictable, Preventable and Deadly: Storm-Related Carbon Monoxide Poisoning in 200 Words

Population Health Sciences

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With Hurricane Florence bearing down on North and South Carolina today, we at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP)'s Poison Control Center (PCC) are saddened to think of an additional threat that doesn't make the news as much as wind and flood damage: the epidemic of storm-related carbon monoxide poisoning.

When homeowners are left without electric power for prolonged periods due to inclement weather, they often resort to using portable, gasoline–powered generators too close to, or even within, their homes. While this practice may seem harmless to families in an emergency, it has actually resulted in hundreds of deaths and injuries per year in the U.S., and is especially problematic for families with young children.

Most portable generators on the market today emit large quantities of carbon monoxide, estimated to be equivalent to that of hundreds of idling late model cars. Considering the lasting harm that can come from carbon monoxide exposure, the amount that is dispersed from these models of generators particularly concerns me. Very recently, low-emission models have become available, but few families have switched to these options.

Providers, policymakers and families can all play a role in protecting children from carbon monoxide poisoning. Providers can talk with parents about having working carbon monoxide detectors in every home and never placing generators in basements, garages or even within 25 feet of the home. Ultimately, better regulations that restrict the manufacturing and sales of generators with high carbon monoxide emission is needed. For more information, you can visit PCC's website and read a recent editorial by CHOP-affiliated and other authors in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

Fred M. Henretig, MD, FAAP, FACMT, is a senior toxicologist with the Section of Clinical Toxicology and a medical toxicologist in the Poison Control Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategy & Communications Manager Lauren Walens.