

Pediatric carbon monoxide poisoning linked to video games after Hurricane Ike

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Hours after Hurricane Ike roared ashore in Texas, more than two million homes were without power, which left some scrambling to preserve food and others looking for ways to entertain children, a move that proved to be, in some instances, poisonous. Researchers at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston found that 75 percent of children treated for carbon monoxide poisoning caused by gasoline-powered electrical generators were playing video games.

When interviewed by researchers, families reported using the generators, which they placed inside the home or an attached garage, to power televisions and [video game](#) systems.

"This was a new experience for us. We usually have patients arriving in the emergency department with carbon monoxide poisoning because they tried to keep food fresh, run a fan or home air conditioner, but not power [electronic gadgets](#)," said Caroline Fife, M.D., associate professor of medicine at the UT Health Science Center at Houston. "We were also targeting messages about generator safety to adults. Text messages were sent out through a cell phone provider with safety tips. Next time, we are going to have to consider reaching out to children. Many of them now have their own cell phones."

Of the 37 individuals treated for carbon monoxide poisoning after the storm, 20 were under the age of 20. In nine of those cases, researchers were able to speak with families to determine why a generator was being used. In 75 percent of those cases, the generator was used to run video

games. The data are published in the June 1 issue of the *Journal of Pediatrics*.

All of the patients were treated at Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center, the only hospital in Houston with a hyperbaric oxygen treatment center that is capable of treating patients with carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide is a product of combustion of organic matter with an insufficient oxygen supply. When kept inside the home generators give off carbon monoxide and people can begin breathing it in causing symptoms such as headaches, nausea and flu-like effects. If exposed for a longer length of time, death can occur. Carbon monoxide poisoning is the most common cause of poisoning death in the United States. A hyperbaric chamber is used to give 100 percent oxygen under increased atmospheric pressure to patients exposed to carbon monoxide.

"Discovering that generators are so frequently used to power entertainment devices for children suggests that school programs should be considered in states at risk for hurricane-related power outages," Fife said. "We also learned that using cell phone providers to send out text messages might be effective. If a future storms approaches, we hope to enlist the help of more providers and send out messages to the most vulnerable populations, our children."

Source: University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston ([news : web](#))

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