Gas heating - health and safety issues

Summary

- Have your gas heater serviced by a licensed gasfitter at least once every two years.
- If you have your heater serviced regularly and use it correctly, it should be safe.
- When using a gas heater, always follow the operating instructions on the appliance or in the manual, if you have one.
- Health problems that seem to be worse or only occur when the heating is on may be caused by carbon monoxide from a faulty gas heater.

Gas heaters need to be professionally installed and properly looked after by a qualified gasfitter. An unsafe heater can cause a house fire or pollute your home with dangerous fumes. If you have your gas heater regularly serviced and use it correctly, it should be safe to use.

Some gas heaters have been identified as posing a serious health risk. The Department of Health and Human Services Victoria advises that you do not use a Vulcan Heritage or Pyrox Heritage gas heater in your home until they are tested by a qualified gasfitter.

Servicing gas heaters

Professional servicing, including inspection of the flue or chimney, is recommended. Get your heater serviced:

- immediately if there is any sign of trouble
- at least every two years (before the winter heating season).

Manufacturers and suppliers usually have recommended service agents. You can use these if you wish. You can also enquire with your gas company, search online, or check the Yellow Pages (under ‘h’ for heating).

If you do find a gas heating specialist from the Yellow Pages or online, make sure that they are a licensed gasfitter endorsed for gas appliance servicing. You can check this on the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) website, or in person, by asking to see the tradesperson’s VBA licence. If they are registered and licensed, they will have a photo ID card that states what kinds of work they are allowed to do. They should carry this with them, and you can ask to see it at any time.

Do-it-yourself gas heater cleaning

Beyond regularly having the heater serviced by a licensed gasfitter, you can do limited cleaning of your heater to reduce odours or fumes, including vacuuming out any duct registers as necessary (the register is the central heating duct opening in each room, which can be seen when the cover grill is lifted).

Make sure that the heater is turned off and cool before cleaning it.

Leave the cleaning of filters and fans on gas heaters to licensed gasfitters.

How to use a gas heater safely

Always follow the operating instructions on the appliance or in the manual if you have one.

Always:

- have plenty of ventilation – ventilation is very important as it allows fresh air to come in and fumes to go out
- prevent young children and elderly people from touching very hot surfaces. The normal dress guard only protects against accidental clothing contact
- be careful when drying clothes inside – keep all flammable materials at least one metre away from the...
Never:

- use an unflued gas heater in a bathroom, bedroom or caravan. Toxic gases may cause serious health problems in these situations
- use or store solvents, aerosols or pressure pack cans near a gas heater — even if the heater is turned off, the pilot light may still be on
- dispose of rubbish such as tissues, cotton buds or other things in a gas fire — this can affect combustion and produce dangerous pollutants
- use an outdoor appliance inside (this includes barbeques and patio heaters).

Signs of a faulty gas heater

A faulty gas heater can cause serious problems. Health problems that seem to be worse or only occur when the heating is on may be caused by carbon monoxide from a faulty gas heater.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- tiredness
- shortness of breath
- headaches
- dizziness
- nausea
- weakness
- confusion
- chest pain.

High levels of carbon monoxide are very dangerous and may cause people to pass out or even die. If you suspect you may be affected by carbon monoxide, open windows and doors, turn off the appliance and go outside to fresh air. See your GP and ask whether your symptoms may be related to carbon monoxide.

When to service your gas heater

Your heater needs to be serviced if:

- it has not been serviced for two years
- there is a yellow or sooty flame (unless it is a decorative gas log fire)
- the pilot light goes out unexpectedly, or ‘pops’ or ‘bangs’ when lighting
- there are signs of heat damage such as discoloration of the walls or heater panels
- the walls become too hot to touch while the heater is on
- there are soot stains around the heater.

Replace old gas heaters

Heaters do not last forever. Some heaters cannot be repaired for safety reasons and, sometimes, spare parts are not available for older heaters. If your heater is very old (around 15 to 20 years), it may not be possible or worthwhile for your service person to repair it. Be advised by your licensed gasfitter.

Old unflued gas heaters

Old unflued gas heaters are only allowed, by law, in homes supplied by an LPG (liquid petroleum gas) cylinder or tank if they meet strict installation requirements.

These heaters do not meet current emission standards. Replace any unflued heaters that are more than 10 years old, or if you feel that your health is being affected by them.

By law, an existing fluless LPG space heater must only be replaced by an LPG fluless heater that meets very stringent emission conditions.
Extra safety tips for gas heaters

- Always make sure that a patio heater is stable or fixed, and only use them outdoors.
- Never use or store a gas cylinder indoors.
- Never use an industrial-type heater in a domestic situation.

Where to get help

- **Energy Safe Victoria** Tel. 1800 800 158
- **Environmental Health Unit, Department of Health and Human Services** Tel. 1300 761 874
- Your GP
- **Licensed gasfitter**
- **Victorian Building Authority** – to check that you’re dealing with a licensed gasfitter Tel. 1300 815 127

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Department of Health and Human Services - RHP&R - Health Protection - Environmental Health Unit

---

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)