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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) annual meeting, May 31-June 2, 2006, Hyatt Regency, San Antonio, TX.

PREDICTING AND PREVENTING GAMBLING PROBLEMS

Risk factors for teenagers and adults

Gambling shows on television, on-line gambling parlors, state lotteries, and a growing casino industry mean opportunities to gamble have proliferated in the United States over the last few decades. Forty-eight states now allow some form of gambling. Most Americans now live within a 2-hour drive of some type of high stakes gambling venue. Research suggests that living near a casino or having other opportunities to gamble may increase the chance that someone will become a problem gambler – someone who sacrifices work, school, and relationships in order to keep playing. Faced with this situation, researchers are looking for ways to prevent problem gambling, in part by drawing on substance abuse research. Research suggests that there is a link between problem gambling and substance use, as they often co-occur and appear to have similar risk factors. In addition, teenagers deserve special attention, since many adult pathological gamblers report having made their first bet as a teenager.

- **How many teenagers are likely to become problem gamblers?**
- **Are the risk factors for teenage gambling similar to those for drug and alcohol abuse?**
- **Are there identifiable types of problem gamblers?**

In this symposium at the Society for Prevention Research (SPR) Annual Meeting, researchers will discuss the parallels between substance abuse and gambling and how substance abuse prevention programs may help curb gambling problems. In addition, this symposium will present new information about teenage and adult gamblers.

Researchers will discuss a study among middle-school boys and girls that measured how closely gambling is tied to substance abuse and to risk factors for drug and alcohol use, such as coping with anger and thrill seeking. In addition, they will discuss a study that followed more than 300 young people beginning in mid-adolescence, to measure how many of them tried gambling, whether it was a problem, and whether the problem persisted into young adulthood. Finally, researchers will also discuss the need for a new way to classify problem gamblers of all ages, that moves beyond the traditional labels of 'non-problem gamblers,' 'problem gamblers,' and 'pathological gamblers.'

Sources: Bethany Bray, M.S., Linda M. Collins, Ph.D., Ty Ridenour, Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University; Ken Winters, University of Minnesota.