

YOUTH PROBLEM GAMBLING FACT SHEET

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REVISED – October, 2014

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YOUTH – FACTS

In California, the legal age to gamble is 18 for the lottery and 21 for most other legal forms of gambling. However, many young people begin to gamble long before they reach adulthood. Because it is more socially acceptable and “safe” than other possibly addictive behaviors such as drinking, smoking and drug use, many parents may choose to turn a blind eye to their adolescent child’s gambling. Like adults, however, teens can become problem or pathological gamblers, and are in fact more likely to develop problems.

Population: According to the 2013 U.S. Census estimates, 23.3% of the U.S. population is under the age of 18. In California, 23.9%, or almost 9 million people, are under 18.¹

Gambling Participation: According to the 2009-2011 California Health Kids Survey, 42% of grade 7 students and 31% of grade 11 students have ever placed a bet within the past year.²

Problematic Behavior: First, we must define problem gambling. The National Council on Problem Gambling defines *Problem Gambling as* gambling behavior which causes disruptions in any major area of life: psychological (mental stress, anxiety, depression, emotional breakdown, etc.), physical (health complications, lack of sleep, poor nutrition, etc.), social (neglecting friends and family, loss of social networks, etc.) or vocational (loss of job, losing productivity due to gambling, etc.).³ Problem Gambling is usually used as a general category that includes every type of gambling behavior that causes major problems. On the other hand, *Pathological Gambling* is considered the most serious form of problem gambling, and is actually classified as a mental health disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. Put in another way, pathological gamblers are those we consider to be *addicted* to gambling.

According to the 2006 California Problem Gambling Prevalence Study, Approximately 1 million California adults experience significant problems related to gambling, and another 2.2 to 2.7 million California adults are at risk for developing gambling related problems.⁴

Based on other states’ problem gambling prevalence rates, the California Attorney General estimates that there are nearly 600,000 youth problem gamblers in the state.⁵ Studies have shown that, compared to adults, youths are 2 to 4 times more likely to become problem gamblers⁶, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed later in the Risk Factors section.

TYPES OF YOUTH GAMBLING

While it is illegal for youth under age 18 to gamble in most states, there are still many ways that youth are exposed and indoctrinated into the world of gambling:

Card Games: Televised poker tournaments and celebrity poker players are believed to have fueled the resurgent popularity of poker among youth. Many of these poker tournaments are broadcasted on TV channels that normally broadcast sports – casting a social message that poker is a sport, rather than a form of gambling.

- According to the 2009-2011 California Health Kids Survey, 14% of grade 11 students and 44% of grade 7 students have bet money on card games within the past year.⁷

Lottery: Lottery and scratch-off tickets are perceived by youth in many studies to be easily accessible and it is often pretty easy for underage patrons to purchase them without having to show their IDs. In California, lottery is available in over 21,000 locations/ retailers – including liquor stores, grocers, etc.⁸ California’s lottery commercials are seen and heard on TV and radio, respectively, by everyone – including youth. These commercials often also appear during programs that are tailored to young people – such as local pop music radio stations and youth-oriented TV shows.

- According to the 2009-2011 California Health Kids Survey, 11% of grade 11 students and 13% of grade 7 students have purchased a lottery ticket at least once in the past year.⁹

Casinos: While casinos are supposed to turn underage patrons away, many studies have found that youth routinely gain access into casinos to gamble.

- California Friday Night Live Partnership’s youth focus groups found that casinos is the 3rd most common locale where youth gamble (reported by 21% of youth).¹⁰

Sports: In recent years, sports has been frequently associated with gambling – anywhere from a famous football player’s involvement in animal-fighting operations, to sports referees engaging in point shaving to influence betting/ gambling outcomes. Betting on sports itself is also a very common activity for youth.

- According to the 2009-2011 California Health Kids Survey, 20% of grade 11 students and 22% of grade 7 students have bet on sports at least once in the past year.¹¹

Internet: Today’s youth are well-versed, and perhaps even more so than adults, in digital media technologies. As a result of their competency and frequent engagement in such technologies, they are likely exposed to many online gambling activities. While research into the impact of “e-gambling” on the youth population is limited, this section seeks to explore the prevalence of internet gambling among youth, the types of digital games that may lead to experimentation with gambling, and the unique risks these forms of gambling pose on adolescents.

Internet Gambling & Youth



Prevalence: Despite legal attempts to restrict internet gambling, there are still young people gambling online. According to the 2009-2011 California Health Kids Survey:

- 2% of 11th graders and 2% of 7th graders have ever gambled on the internet for money¹²



Why Internet Gambling Is Appealing to Youth: People who gamble on the internet for money have reported that the main reasons why they gamble online are:

- 24-hour access and the convenience of not having to leave home
- High speed of play
- Diversity of games
- Financial bonuses offered by some online gambling sites
- Privacy
- Competition¹³

These reasons in combination with the incorporation of video-game technology into online gambling sites, availability of free demo sites, incentive programs, aggressive online advertisements, and opportunity to win money make internet gambling an increasingly appealing activity.



Video Games and Gambling: Youth are growing up in a culture where gambling is readily accessible and socially accepted form of entertainment¹⁴. Although the law prohibits youth under 18 from engaging in legalized gambling activities, youth are able to play video games and other digital media that may promote gambling behavior. Some researchers have suggested that adolescents who play video games are more likely to become gamblers¹⁵. A study by Gupta and Derevensky in 1996¹⁶ found that children aged 9-14 who frequently played video games were more likely to have gambled, to gamble at least weekly, and to take greater risks while gambling.

It is possible that avid video game players are attracted to gambling activities because both kinds of games employ a variable schedule of reinforcement, or in other words, unpredictable outcomes. In video games, despite the presence of chance, a player may develop the skills necessary to move through the levels of the game. It is not surprising, then, that young video game players often mistakenly believe that the “practice makes perfect” adage also applies to gambling. Because of their illusion of control over the gambling scenario, avid video game players tend to wager larger amounts of money and take more risks while gambling¹⁷.

A look at several contemporary video games highlights the blurry line between playing video games and gambling. Some video games incorporate games of chance or gambling scenarios to offer players a way to earn extra rewards or more rapid advancement in the game¹⁸. For example, in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, players can visit Las Vegas-style casinos and play casino games like blackjack, roulette, slots, and video poker. The better a player’s gambling skills, the more

access he has to higher level tables and the more potential he has to win big “in-game” money. In *Fable II Pub Games*, as an optional activity before initiating the main video game journey, players have the chance to play casino-style games and win money and unique items for their *Fable II* character. The more gold points a player collects during this pre-game experience, the richer his character will be at the start of the game. If the player accumulates debt, his character will encounter negative consequences. Again, the illusion of control fostered by the chance-based activities within the skill-dominated video games may lead adolescent players into taking greater and unnecessary risks in real life. Other video games promoting gambling behavior such as *The World Championship Poker*, *World Poker Tour* and *World Series of Poker* are readily accessible to youth on popular game consoles such as Playstation, Xbox and Nintendo^{19, 20}. As casino gambling and video games become more similar, youth will find more difficulty in distinguishing chance from “pseudo skill.”²¹



Implications of New Gambling Technologies on Youth Behavior: A broader look at these new forms of entertainment, including more sophisticated home entertainment systems, suggests that families are changing the way they spend their leisure time. The “cocooning effect,” the trend that families are spending more time at home and less time outdoors, may be influencing how children and teens choose to spend their free time, with many of them preferring technology-based activities over active outdoor activities²². This growing phenomenon, in conjunction with young people’s competence with these new technologies, puts youth at a high risk for exposure to gambling in online environments. A review by King et al. in 2010²³ explains that emerging gambling technologies and the looser restrictions on gambling over the internet may make gambling more accessible, commonplace, socially acceptable, and attractive to youth. Because many parents do not perceive gambling as a harmful activity, gambling has become the “only addictive activity that youngsters are exposed to on a daily basis that is not counterbalanced by negative parental attitudes,” according to Gupta and Derevensky²⁴. Additionally, because of the convenience and anonymous nature of the internet, online gambling can become an easy escape from stress and everyday problems for adolescents, putting users more at risk for developing an addiction to gambling.

GAMBLING AND LEGALITY

Below are the legal ages for various gambling activities in California:

Age 18 + above	Age 21 + above	Illegal at any age
- Lottery	- Racetracks – w/ alcohol	- Animal fights
- Bingo	- Las Vegas casinos	- Unlicensed street or at-home gambling
- Racetracks – no alcohol	- Tribal casinos – w/	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tribal Casinos – no alcohol - Cardrooms – no alcohol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> alcohol - Cardrooms – w/ alcohol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online Gambling
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GAMBLING IN THE MEDIA

TV, radio, and newspaper still remain a powerful source of information and cultural learning for youth. Some examples of recent pop-media references to gambling:

- *21* (Movie, 2008): Plot: "21" is the fact-based story about six MIT students who were trained to become experts in card counting and subsequently took Vegas casinos for millions in winnings.
- *Ocean's Thirteen* (Movies, 2007): Plot: Danny Ocean rounds up the boys for a third heist, after casino owner Willy Bank double-crosses one of the original eleven, Reuben Tishkoff.
- *Casino Royale: 007* (Movie, 2006): Plot: In his first mission, James Bond must stop Le Chiffre, a banker to the world's terrorist organizations, from winning a high-stakes poker tournament at Casino Royale in Montenegro.
- *Two for the Money* (Movie, 2005): Plot: After suffering a career-ending injury, a former college football star aligns himself with one of the most renowned touts in the sports-gambling business.

RISK FACTORS

Developmental Stages: Developmentally, the period of adolescence and youth is marked by risk-taking behaviors, experimentation with “adult” behaviors, and the need of acceptance by peers and to conform to group norms.²⁵ These characteristics may predispose youth to be more prone to take up gambling. Research has shown that the human brain is not fully matured until about age 25. One of the last areas of the brain to develop is the prefrontal cortex – which is associated with decision-making, judgment, and impulse control.²⁶ The fact that in adolescents and youth, this part of the brain is not fully developed has implications for a variety of risk-taking behaviors including reckless driving, drug and alcohol use, and gambling.

Early Exposure: Most problem gamblers start gambling at a very young age, often before age 10.²⁷ Just like early use of alcohol and drugs, the early exposure to gambling can also create more problems. This is related to brain development – where the use of substances OR behaviors (e.g. shopping, internet, video games, gambling) over time to cause a rush of excitement/ pleasure can create addictions. Addiction is defined in part by the adaptation of the brain (this adaptation is called tolerance – the need to use more/ do more over time to achieve the same high/ excitement). Therefore, it’s important to understand that even though gambling doesn’t involve the intake of substances/ chemicals, the thrill of possibly winning money also activates the neuron-chemicals in our brain, and over time can cause changes in the brain – thus creating addiction.

Lack of Coping Skills: Gambling usually doesn't just appear out of nowhere. Most youth problem gamblers come from households where 1 or more parents gambled excessively.²⁸ Another source for youth to pick up gambling is through peers/ friends.²⁹ We pick up coping skills by observing and learning from others how they deal with stress, pain, and boredom. When a young person grows up in an environment where people used substances or gambling to escape their problems, then that becomes their coping mechanism of choice. Research finds that youth problem gamblers were more likely than non-problem gamblers to report gambling to escape, to alleviate depression, to promote relaxation, and to cope with loneliness.³⁰ These same youth also report that gambling makes them feel more important, special, and successful.³¹

Co-Occurring Problems: Several studies have shown that youth gamblers also engage in the use of substances, including smoking, drinking, and other drug use.³² For some youth, particularly males, gambling may fit within a larger constellation of deviant behaviors that include delinquent behaviors and substance use. Youth who are problem gamblers are often also dubbed as troubled youth³³, and they are also more likely to report engaging in illegal acts, stealing, or borrowing money to sustain their gambling activities.³⁴

Gender: A study in Minnesota of 9th and 12th graders found that males had rates of gambling participation 8 times that of females.³⁵ A study in Texas corroborated that males are more likely than females to be a gambler. But when the Texas study compared their survey results from the year 1992 and the year 1995, the gender gap appears to be closing (rates of gambling by females were rising).³⁶ A separate study also found that among girls who actively play video games, their rates of gambling were similar to that of boys (think about how these activities are similar: taking risks for reward; color/graphic/music design; used to relief stress, excitement when playing, etc.)³⁷

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Source: The Search Institute (2002).³⁸ The more protective factors that a young person has, the less likely they are to develop problems related to substance abuse, problem gambling, and other issues. These are some of the protective factors that have been found to help shield youth from developing problem gambling:

- **Support** (family, community, school) – Youth finds high level of love and support from their family (could be parents, guardians, or even from an older adolescent), community and school (could be other caring older adolescents or adults).
- **Positive outlook** – Youth is optimistic about her/his personal future.
- **Realistic boundaries and expectations** – The family, community and school all have clear rules and boundaries for how youth should behave; and the youth is encouraged by both parents/guardians and teachers to do well in school.
- **Internal control** – Youth feels that she/he has control over “things that happen to me”.
- **High self-esteem** - Youth reports having high self esteem and feels good about self.
- **Constructive use of time/contributing** – Youth spends time in activities such as creative arts, youth programs, and in community activities such as faith-based programs, etc.

- **Good problem solving skills** – Youth seeks to resolve conflicts and problems nonviolently, and uses.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau (2013). State and County QuickFacts: California. Available at: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/>

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³ National Council on Problem Gambling. Available at: www.ncpgambling.org

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