

# College Gambling

## FACT SHEET

In a review of 23 college studies, the prevalence of problem gambling was 7% for college students, compared to 3.4% for adults, and the prevalence of pathological gambling in college students was 5%, compared to only 1.7% in adults!

*(Shaffer et al., 1999)*

Gambling is now a more popular activity among teens than smoking or using drugs!

*(McGill University)*

About 4.6% of people in British Columbia have problems with gambling  
*(BC Partnership for Responsible Gambling)*



Gambling involves risking something of value on an uncertain outcome in the hopes of increasing value or profit. Gambling is generally regarded as a problem when the gambler begins to experience a number of negative consequences from their gambling, including feelings of guilt, gambling more than intended, and spending less time at school or at work. Pathological gambling involves a persistent pattern of gambling that causes disruptions in the gambler's personal, familial, and work life.

### **Why focus on colleges and universities?**

Gambling is a popular activity for many college and university students, for some, it is a serious problem. Post-secondary students are more likely to engage in risky behaviours, such as binge drinking, driving while intoxicated, or having unprotected sex, but only recently has gambling become a concern for post-secondary schools. National research studies in countries such as Canada, the United States, and New Zealand, indicate that the prevalence of problem and pathological gambling in the general population ranges between to six percent. But, the rate of pathological gambling has been found to range up to eight times higher in college students!

A recent problem is the high rate of student internet gambling. Internet gambling is a particular concern because, for many students, they are engaging in this activity while away from home for the first time and spending long periods of time unsupervised. The recent explosion of internet gambling sites suggests that students now have constant access to gambling and for many, the temptation to gamble can be overwhelming. In a New Zealand study, 16% of college student gamblers were identified as problem gamblers compared to the national average of just over one percent.

### **How do post-secondary institutions deal with gambling?**

Problem gambling has only begun to receive attention on college and university campuses, and many campuses are still in the process of developing awareness and intervention programs. A particular concern for post-secondary schools is student use of financial aid as a source of gambling funds or school drop-out due to overwhelming debt accumulated by gambling.

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## Some Myths about Gambling

*"If I keep gambling, my luck will change."*

In fact, the outcome on each play is independent of the last one, meaning you have the same chance of winning or losing each time.

*"I can control the outcome of a spin by pressing the button at the right time."*

From the time you start the 'play' the outcome has already been determined by a Random Number Generator – in reality, you have no control over where the spin will stop.

### Centre for Public Safety and Criminal Justice Research

33844 King Road  
Abbotsford, BC  
V2S 7M8  
604 854-4553  
<http://cjr.ufv.ca>

## What are the warning signs of problem gambling?

The warning signs of problem gambling include: preoccupation with gambling; increased amount of time spent gambling; placing larger bets; and, often neglecting familial, employment, or personal needs and commitments. Problem gamblers are likely to experience increasing debt which may lead them to 'chase their losses', or gamble more often in attempt to win back the money they lost, pinning their hopes on the 'one big win'. In addition, problem gamblers may borrow money from others or become involved in illegal activities due to their increasing debt in order to finance their gambling. Problem gamblers may also attempt to hide the extent to which they are involved in gambling by lying and/or arguing about gambling with family and friends. They may also have extreme mood swings and experience depression and/or anxiety.

## So what can be done about this?

If you think that you or someone you know has a gambling problem contact somebody for help. British Columbia has a free and confidential Problem Gambling Program and a toll-free help line. British Columbia also has Gambler's Anonymous meetings seven days a week. Gam-Anon is an organization that gives support to friends and families of problem gamblers. You can also find more helpful information in the resources section below.

## Resources

- B.C. Partnership for Responsible Gambling  
<http://www.bcreponsiblegambling.ca/>
- B.C. 24-hour toll-free Problem Gambling Helpline **1-888-795-6111**.
- BC Problem Gambling Program **(250) 387-0757**.
- Gambler's Anonymous  
<http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/>
- Gam-Anon  
<http://www.gam-anon.org/>
- Shaffer, H.J., Hall, M.N., & Bilt, J.V. (1999). Estimating the prevalence of disordered gambling behavior in the United States and Canada: A research synthesis. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89: 1369-1378.