

# Stakes High for Young Gamblers, Experts Say

Gambling among America's youth is on the rise, and experts say the long-term stakes are high since young gamblers are the most likely to develop addiction problems.

While the games are typically small-time—underage purchases of lottery tickets or playing cards or dice games for spare change—experts say the wider availability and growing social acceptance of gambling make today's kids particularly vulnerable.

"This is the first generation of kids growing up when gambling is legal and available virtually nationwide," George Meldrum of the Delaware Council on Gambling Problems, told the [Associated Press](#).

Young people who gamble are far more likely than adults to become addicted. Nearly 8 percent of young gamblers have a problem with compulsive gambling, compared with 3 percent of adult gamblers, according to the International Center for Youth Gambling Problems, based at McGill University in Montreal.

And unlike adult gambling addicts, who might seek help when they "hit bottom" and fear losing their spouse or job, young people feel they have less to lose, center director Jeffrey Dervensky, told the wire service.

Gambling statistics are hard to come by on a national level, but regional organizations have been tracking the trends of youth and gambling in their areas.

The [Delaware Council on Gambling Problems](#) recently conducted a survey showing that nearly a third of the 6,753 eighth-graders reported they had gambled in 2002.

And gambling is not a stand-alone vice. The Delaware study also found that young

people who gambled were more likely than other students to smoke, drink alcohol, use illegal drugs and commit petty crimes.

According to a [Federal Trade Commission](#) alert, the most common types of gambling for kids are card games and sports betting. But a growing concern among parents is the availability of Internet gambling, where game operators could be operating from servers outside of the United States—and outside the jurisdiction of state or federal regulations that govern hours of operation, age of participants and the types of games offered.

The Delaware survey revealed that 9 percent of eighth-graders gambled on Internet sites with electronic slots and card games.

"The Internet provides the holy trinity of risk factors—immediate access, anonymity, and, with use of a credit card, the ability to gamble with money you don't really have," Keith Whyte, executive director of the National Council on Problem Gambling told the Associated Press.

McGill's Dervensky said his concern lies with Internet gambling sites that incorporate video-game technology.

"They give you an illusion of control, a sense that the more you play, the better you get," Dervensky told AP. "It's training a whole new generation of kids. Once they get their credit cards, they're off and running."

All kids need to gamble on the Web is access to a credit card or debit cards. Racking up debt on gambling sites can ruin not only the kid's credit, but the parent's credit as well, if the card they are using is not their own.

Gambling is illegal for kids younger than 18, but 80 percent of adult Americans gamble at least occasionally. Some experts see a worrisome tolerance for youth gambling among parents.

"We've had a number of parents say, 'Thank God, it's just gambling,'" Whyte said.

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In a study of Minnesota youth, 60 percent of high school students who were problem gamblers had gambled in the sixth grade or before, according to the [National Council on Problem Gambling](#).

Reports also showed that juveniles commonly start gambling in the United States at younger ages than they use cigarettes, hard liquor or marijuana.

*[Jodi Mathews](#) is news writer for [EthicsDaily.com](#).*