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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) 2003 annual meeting, "Research to Policy," June 12-14, 2003

FEDERALLY-FUNDED SUICIDE DATABASE MAY HELP PREVENT SUICIDE FROM FIREARMS

New Research on Innovative Suicide Prevention Techniques Show Promise

- Can a federally funded National Violent Death Reporting System help prevent suicide from firearms?
- Can therapy help those who have already attempted suicide avoid another attempt?
- Drug use, delinquency and failure in the school increase the risk of suicide attempts. Can preventing these risk factors help prevent suicide?

The majority (57%) of U.S. suicides are firearm deaths. Researchers at the Society for Prevention Research annual meeting will present findings from a study that attempts to design a National Violent Death Reporting System. The U.S. has an excellent data system for reporting on the circumstances of motor vehicle injuries and deaths. That system has helped improve road conditions and vehicle design, and reduce motor vehicle fatalities. But there is no comparable system for other injuries, such as suicide, homicide or unintentional firearm deaths.

The rate of suicide in the U.S. is higher among males, the elderly and rural residents. Also, the percentage of suicides from firearms is higher among these groups. The U.S. has the highest rate of firearm suicide of all 27 high-income nations, but is 16th in overall rates of suicide. Within the U.S., various studies have found that a gun in the home is a risk factor for suicide among adolescents, adults and the elderly. The higher rates of suicide are driven by higher rates of firearm suicide.

Another study to be released at the Society for Prevention Research meeting looks at past and future suicide attempts. Suicide attempts constitute a major risk factor for completed suicide, and researchers want to know if therapy can help prevent future suicide attempts. What sort of therapy can help? How can such therapy be provided? What is the effect of such therapy on hopelessness, depression, suicide ideation, appropriate health care utilization, and overall psychological and social adaptation?

Interventions during childhood years can have an impact on drug and alcohol use, delinquency and school failure. The interventions can also result in improvement in peer, school and family relations. These are well-known risk and protective factors for completed suicide. What can be done during childhood to deal with these issues that may lead to later reduction in suicide?

Sources: Jane Pearson, National Institute of Mental Health; David Hemenway, Harvard University; Beck Aaron and Gregory Brown, University of Pennsylvania; and C. Brown, University of South Florida.