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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) 2004 annual meeting, May 26-28, 2004.

ADOLESCENT SUICIDE: CAN IT BE PREVENTED?

New Study Raises Questions about Role of Schools in Suicide Prevention

- What are the warning signs of suicide, and who is paying attention to them?
- Do we understand which adolescents are in “imminent danger” of committing suicide?
- How does an adolescent plan to commit suicide?
- What is the role of schools in preventing suicide; what is the role of parents?

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15 to 19 year olds. Data for 2001 shows that 9 percent of adolescents had attempted suicide at least once in the preceding year; 15 percent had made a specific suicide plan, 19 percent had seriously considered attempting suicide; and 28 percent of U.S. high school students reported severe depressive feelings. Girls are twice as likely to attempt suicide, but boys are five times more likely to actually commit suicide.

Although adolescent suicide is an important problem with devastating effects, little is known about differences between girls and boys, how to systematically identify youth at risk, and how schools and other community organizations can prevent adolescent suicidal behavior.

Previous research has shown that youth who have made one attempt at suicide are at the highest risk of committing suicide. Adolescents with problems related to depression are also likely to attempt or commit suicide. Academic performance and truancy are also reported to have an impact on adolescent suicide.

A group of researchers presenting at the annual meeting of the Society for Prevention Research will report on new findings on gender differences in depression, and the best methods to screen youth for untreated depression. Researchers will also look at how schools might screen adolescents to identify those at risk of committing suicide.

Sources: Denise Hallfors, Ph.D., Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation; Martha Waller, Ph.D., (need name of institution); Chris Lucas, M.D., Madelyn Gould, M.D. & David Shaffer, M.D., Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center.