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***New Report on Alarming Trends in Girls' Use of Drugs, Alcohol,
Cigarettes, and Prescription Drugs***

***Girls Are Catching Up With Boys in Use of Illicit Substances and Alcohol, Warn
White House Drug Czar, Seventeen Magazine, and Medical Experts***

(New York, NY) — Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) John P. Walters, *Seventeen* magazine, and teen medical experts today released a new analysis of recent findings on drug and alcohol use trends among girls. Despite commonly held beliefs that boys are at higher risk for using illegal substances, data indicate that girls have caught up with boys in illicit drug and alcohol use and have actually surpassed boys in cigarette and prescription drug use. There are also more girls who are new users of substances than boys.

Although substance use among teens has shown steady declines in the past few years, ONDCP and other experts warned parents at a press conference this morning in New York City that girls display unique vulnerabilities that can lead to substance abuse. Research also indicates that drug and alcohol use has a more profound impact on teen girls, both physically and psychologically.

The findings show that when girls use illicit drugs, marijuana is the most commonly used substance. Marijuana is used more than cocaine, heroin, Ecstasy, and all other illicit drugs combined. And for the last two years that research is available (2003-2004), more teenage girls than boys started using marijuana, alcohol, and cigarettes. (The full report on Girls and Drugs can be accessed at www.MediaCampaign.org at http://www.mediacampaign.org/pdf/girls_and_drugs.pdf.)

“Over the last few years, we have seen overall drug use decrease among teens – boys and girls. But the trends of substance use among our adolescent girls are alarming,” said Director Walters. “Girls are telling us that they understand the risks associated with drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes. But that doesn’t appear to be stopping them from using. We are urging parents to become aware of the unique risks that make our daughters vulnerable to substance use and to talk to them about why it’s important to stay drug-free.”

Research shows that teenage girls use drugs and alcohol for different reasons than boys. Many girls experience a dramatic transition during early adolescence, marked by a decline in their self-esteem and self-confidence. And girls are more than twice as likely as boys to report depression. Indeed, surveys show that young females tend to use alcohol or drugs to improve mood, increase confidence, reduce tension, cope with problems or lose inhibitions. Another often-cited reason among girls for their substance abuse is weight loss. In fact, girls’ use of diet pills is up to four times that of boys.

“Teen girls are figuring out what they want out of life and who they want to be. They are becoming more and more independent, and are starting to make decisions that will affect them now and into the future. Combine this new responsibility with all the stress and pressures in their lives and the result, unfortunately, can be substance abuse,” said Atoosa Rubenstein, Editor-in-Chief of *Seventeen* magazine.

Adolescent girls are particularly susceptible to the physical and mental consequences of substance use, especially at a critical time in life, when their bodies and brains are still developing:

- Recent studies show that marijuana use may in fact increase the risk of depression. One study showed that girls (ages 14-15) who used marijuana daily were five times more likely to face depression at age 21. Weekly use among all teens studied doubled the risk for depression.
- Girls may develop symptoms of nicotine addiction faster than boys.
- Adolescent girls who consume even moderate amounts of alcohol may experience disrupted growth and puberty.

“The substance use trends that we are seeing for adolescent girls are disturbing. Using drugs and alcohol – particularly during this stage of development – can have serious consequences on the brains and bodies of our daughters,” said Warren M. Seigel, M.D., FAAP, FSAM, Past President of American Academy of Pediatrics - Chapter 2, New York. “Parents need to understand the risks and consequences that are unique to girls if they are to help keep them away from drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol.”

In fact, parental disapproval plays a strong role in preventing teens from drug use. Teens who are regularly monitored by their parents are less likely to use drugs.

ONDCP is partnering with several major corporations to communicate this information to parents. Partners in the effort have pledged to raise awareness among and share parenting tips with their customers and/or employees. In addition, parents and other caregivers can visit www.TheAntiDrug.com to learn the facts about girls and the effects of illicit drug use on their bodies, fun ideas and activities to encourage quality time together, expert advice to commonly asked questions, and a personalized E-card parents can forward to their daughters to let them know how much they care.

Since its inception in 1998, the ONDCP’s National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign has conducted outreach to millions of parents, teens and communities to reduce and prevent teen drug use. Counting on an unprecedented blend of public and private partnerships, non-profit community service organizations, volunteerism, and youth-to-youth communications, the Campaign is designed to reach Americans of diverse backgrounds with effective anti-drug messages.

For more information on the ONDCP National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, visit www.MediaCampaign.org

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