



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – March 3, 2004

AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS:

-- Jeffery Wilkins, M.D., Vice Chairman, Dept. of Psychiatry, Director of Addiction Medicine

CEDARS-SINAI PSYCHIATRIST AND DIRECTOR OF ADDICTION MEDICINE OFFERS TIPS ON HOW TO HAVE FUN WHILE STAYING SAFE DURING SPRING BREAK

LOS ANGELES, CA (March 3, 2004) – For decades, spring break has been a time for college kids to escape the rigors of academic life by heading to the beaches for sun, fun, parties, and flirting. But over the years, the week-long break has turned into an event for students to engage in excessive drinking, that for some has led to accidents, violence, vandalism, sexual aggression and even death.

“The problem of excessive drinking during spring break continues despite public service messages extolling the attendant risks,” said Jeffery Wilkins, M.D., a psychiatrist and the Director of Addiction Medicine at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. “But what college students need to understand is that binge drinking actually defeats the purpose of having fun partying. Male students should remember that its hard to find a date when the room is spinning, that dancing is, at best, difficult when one is unable to stand, and that new encounters are off to a poor start when the ambience includes the odor of fresh vomit. Female students may need to be reminded that an intoxicated male is much less likely to understand that ‘no’ means ‘no’ even when uttered by an intoxicated female, even though intoxication is not a defense for sexual aggression by either males or females.”

Although the statistics are limited on the numbers of students who binge drink during spring break, one study published in the *Journal of American College Health* in 1998, reported that:

- The average male drank 18 drinks per day.
- The average female reported drinking 10 drinks per day.
- Among those surveyed, more than 50 percent of the men and 40 percent of all women drank until they were sick or passed out at least once.
- 40 percent of males and 33 percent of the females reported being drunk daily during spring break.

Binge drinking, or drinking an excessive amount of alcohol in a short amount of time, is the most frequent cause of alcohol poisoning, a condition that occurs when the level of alcohol in the blood is so high that it may cause the collapse of the autonomic nervous system. Men who consume five or more drinks in one sitting and women who consume four or more drinks in one sitting, at least once every two weeks, are considered binge drinkers. Binge drinking also leads to uncontrollable behaviors that can have serious consequences. Such

-more-

behaviors include unplanned sexual activity and an increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), sexual assault, other violent acts that result in injury or death, and injury or death from car accidents and destruction of property.

In 2002, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), issued a report stating that 1,400 college students from ages 18 to 24 die each year from alcohol-related injuries, while 500,000 students are injured under the influence of alcohol. In addition, 400,000 students aged 18 to 24 have unprotected sex each year and more than 100,000 are too intoxicated to know whether they consented to having sex. Further, more than 70,000 students aged 18 to 24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape each year.

“Binge drinking is tantamount to giving up control of ones environment and perhaps ones behavior... No student is exempt from the risks of excessive drinking,” said Dr. Wilkins. “What starts out seeming like a good time, can quickly turn into a nightmare for themselves, their parents and their friends.”

Given these statistics, Dr. Wilkins says that young people need to redefine how they will have fun during their spring break. “Remember, it’s not fun ending up in a hospital or jail when you’re on vacation,” said Dr. Wilkins. The following are his tips to have fun, while avoiding the potentially damaging or even life-threatening consequences of binge drinking.

- 1. If your goal is to drink, limit it.** “Guidelines put forth jointly by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture define moderate drinking as no more than one drink a day for most women, and no more than two drinks a day for most men. A standard drink is generally considered to be 12 ounces of beer, five ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits,” said Dr. Wilkins.
- 2. Don’t drink and drive or allow anyone you know to drive drunk.** Use public transportation or designate a driver.
- 3. Know the laws in the state or country you are staying and what will happen if you violate them.**
- 4. Know the signs of alcohol poisoning.** The most dangerous consequence of binge drinking is alcohol poisoning. It can lead to brain damage, lung infections, pneumonia, a coma or death. A high level of alcohol in the body can numb the brain cells associated with breathing, so if the brain stops signaling the body to breathe, a person will ultimately suffocate and die. Symptoms include unconsciousness, where a person can’t be wakened; cold and clammy skin that may be bluish in color; very slow or labored breathing; or vomiting without waking up.
- 5. Don’t mix sex and drinking.** “Being drunk increases your chances of contracting a sexually transmitted disease and for instigating or becoming a victim of sexual assault,” said Dr. Wilkins.
- 6. Change your thinking about drinking.** If you think that you can control yourself and that letting yourself go on a drinking binge during spring break won’t harm you, think again. Over 10 percent of young people have a strong genetic pre-disposition for alcohol addiction and binge drinking opens the door for those people at risk. “These young people, in particular, need to know their family history and if they have one, they most likely shouldn’t be drinking at all,” said Dr. Wilkins.

7. **Make sure your parents know where you are.** “When young people involve their parents in their spring break plans, they are less likely to get into trouble,” said Dr. Wilkins. “Give your parents the names and numbers of hotels where you will be staying and check in with them daily.”
8. **Don’t drink and take drugs.** Alcohol may interact harmfully with more than 100 medications, including some sold over the counter. The effects of alcohol are especially augmented by medications that depress the function of the central nervous system, such as sedatives, sleeping pills, anticonvulsants, antidepressants, antianxiety drugs, and certain painkillers. There is a consequent increased danger of driving an automobile after even moderate drinking if such medications are taken. Mixing illegal drugs such as rophynol or “roofies” can also cause serious physical effects such as vomiting, liver failure and seizures.

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is one of the largest non-profit academic medical centers in the Western United States. For the fifth straight two-year period, Cedars-Sinai has been named Southern California’s gold standard in health care in an independent survey. Cedars-Sinai is internationally renowned for its diagnostic and treatment capabilities and its broad spectrum of programs and services, as well as breakthrough in biomedical research and superlative medical education. Named one of the 100 “Most Wired” hospitals in health care in 2001, the Medical Center ranks among the top 10 non-university hospitals in the nation for its research activities.

#

If you have received this news release in error and do not wish to receive future advisories, or if they should be directed to someone else in your organization, please call 1-800-396-1002. Alternatively, you may fax your updated information or your request for removal from our list to 808-263-3364 or e-mail it to sandy@vancommunications.com.