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CHILDREN AS YOUNG AS 11 CAN SET UP GAMBLING ACCOUNTS AT THE CLICK OF A BUTTON

Children as young as 11 can set up gambling accounts on a huge number of websites, new research reveals.

A report out today (July 27) by leading children's charity NCH, GamCare and CitizenCard, reveals that only seven out of 37 gambling sites tested stopped a 16-year-old registering her details online. The youngster from London was able to lie successfully about her age and register her details on websites under test conditions using her Solo card.

Many sites would also allow her to gamble in several ways, including interactive television, mobile telephones and telephone betting, using the same account set up online.

This is despite the existence of age verification systems specially designed to block accounts for under-18s at the point of registration.

Minister for Gambling Andrew McIntosh says: *"These are very worrying findings. Having already warned the industry that Solo cards should be treated with caution it is disappointing to find so many haven't taken this on board. I will raise this with them again, and I'm confident that they will respond positively this time. The banking sector should take some responsibility too.*

"We will continue to prompt them to do everything possible to help the gambling industry properly identify whether their customers are 18 or not. But above all this shows that in the face of rapidly changing technology our gambling laws are unable to keep pace. We hope to introduce the Gambling Bill in Autumn and this will include powerful new protections for children including a requirement that remote gambling sites operating from the UK will, by law, be compelled to make proper age verification checks."

Now NCH, GamCare and CitizenCard are calling for:

- All online gambling sites in the UK to install effective age verification systems as a matter of urgency to block youngsters registering online.
- The government to push forward measures set out in the Gambling Bill as soon as possible to protect children from gambling.
- Banks and credit card companies to play a greater role in preventing underage gambling.

A significant number of banks supply debit cards to under 18s – and some provide Visa Electron and Solo cards to 11 year olds.

John Carr, NCH’s Internet Advisor, says: *“It is shocking that children as young as 11 are able to register with online gambling sites. There are no excuses for this. The technology for these companies to clean up their act already exists. But it is being used by a very small number of the operators we surveyed. We urge everybody to install age verification software as a matter of urgency.”*

At the moment age verification systems are available to the industry to confirm whether a person is over the age of 18. All companies tested were written to and asked to review the way they block underage access two months before the 16 year old went online.

Gamcare Remote Gambling Specialist Michael Smeaton says: *“Unfortunately the results were very disappointing. While GamCare has been encouraged by the progress made by several companies, overall there appears to be a lack of adequate measures in place to tackle underage gambling on the net.”*

CitizenCard chief executive Andrew Chevis says: *“The vast majority of the 37 websites we tested are directly connected to the UK market – or are regulated in the UK. We want to encourage these sites to use the solutions that already exist.”*

CitizenCard, GamCare and NCH are also concerned that many online gambling sites inviting people to “play for free” – with no age restrictions – encourage youngsters to gamble from an early age.

Interviews are available with the 16-year-old teenager who carried out the test, NCH, GamCare and CitizenCard spokespeople.

For further press information please contact Grant Imlach or Siobhan McCann in the NCH press office on 020 7704 7111. Out-of-hours mobile: 07802 806 679.

Notes to Editors

1. Out of 37 sites tested, only seven effectively blocked the player at point of registration. Four of these sites were based in Alderney. These were www.luckyme.co.uk, www.skybetvegas.com, www.virgingames.com and www.hardrockcasino.com. Two UK-based sites successfully implemented an age verification system. These were www.nationallottery.co.uk and www.ladbrokes.com. One site did not accept Solo debit cards. This was www.cyberslotz.co.uk
2. A total of 30 sites did not block access at point of registration. These were www.888.com, www.bet365.com, www.betdaq.com, www.betdirect.net, www.betfair.com, www.bluesq.com, www.casinoonnet.com, www.celebpoker.com, www.coral.co.uk, www.galacasino.co.uk, www.gamingclub.co.uk, www.jackpotjoy.com, www.littlewoodsgameon.co.uk, www.meccagames.com, www.paddypower.com, www.paradisepoker.com, www.punt2punt.com, www.racingpostcasino.co.uk, www.skybet.co.uk, www.sportingbet.com, www.sportingodds.com, www.stanjames.com, www.stanleybet.com, www.totalbet.com, www.tote.co.uk, www.ukbetting.co.uk, www.vegasvilla.com, www.victorchandler.co.uk, www.victorchandlercasino.com and www.willhill.co.uk
3. There are more than 1,500 online betting and gambling websites worldwide. The Association of Payment Clearing Services (APACS) estimates that 45 per cent of all 16 and 17 year olds – totalling 675,000 - own a debit card. The figure for 11 to 17 year olds is likely to be significantly higher.
4. A 16-year-old girl used her Solo card to test out 37 online gambling and betting sites under test conditions. Of the sites that blocked her from registering her details, two didn't accept Solo debit cards, two UK-based sites successfully used age verification systems and four sites were based in Alderney. Jurisdictions such as Alderney and the Isle of Man must verify age by law.
5. NCH runs more than 500 projects for the UK's most vulnerable children, young people and their families and in doing so, supports over 140,000 people. For further information visit www.nch.org.uk
6. CitizenCard is a non-profit identity scheme, which offers anyone a Home Office-recognised ID card. CitizenCard's 'interactiveAgeCheck' accredits websites that authenticate the age and ID of their users. For further information visit www.citizencard.com
7. GamCare is a registered charity and has a commitment to promote responsible attitudes to gambling and to work for the provision of proper care for those who have been harmed by gambling dependency. For further information visit www.gamcare.org.uk