# Video game addiction is a real condition, WHO says

The World Health Organization on Monday officially recognized "gaming disorder" as a condition in its International Classification of Diseases, saying that it is possible to be addicted to video games.

Simply playing a lot of video games does not automatically mean that someone has a problem. The hallmark of the disorder is that playing games overtakes other desires, and that it continues or escalates despite negative consequences. A diagnosis would have to include evidence of this type of behavior lasting for more than 12 months, the organization said.

The disorder affects no more than 3 percent of gamers, the Associated Press reported, with some estimates as low as one percent. More than 2 billion people worldwide regularly play games.

The purpose of including gaming disorder in the ICD is, in part, to bring more attention to the issue and raise the visibility of treatments for those seeking help for excessive video game playing, WHO said. Those seeking treatment for compulsive or addictive technology use, including for gaming, have had trouble finding treatment that is covered by insurance.

Not everyone agrees with the WHO that defining this condition will help patients. The U.S. video game industry - through its Entertainment Software Association lobbying group - threw its support behind several academics who opposed the WHO's efforts when it confirmed last year that they would include "gaming disorder" as a condition. Those experts, who published an article in the Journal of Behavioral Addictions, said that there has not been enough research done to establish it as its own condition, and that the definition of gaming disorder is not consistent.

Clinicians have also debated the validity of establishing a gaming disorder, as it shares many characteristics with other addictive disorders. The American Psychiatric Association identified "Internet Gaming Disorder" as an area for further study in the 2013 version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the central resource for identifying and diagnosing disorders in the United States. It has not officially been added.

But there are people who compulsively play games. People have referred to being "addicted" to games for decades. Many video games are designed to keep people engaged for long periods of time - sometimes employing psychologists to help design games that will appeal to people. There has been a global effort to find treatment for those who play compulsively, especially in light of the deaths of people who continued to play games past the point of dehydration and exhaustion. China, Japan and South Korea all have explored government programs to help "detox" young men and women from internet use, particularly video games.

In the U.S., there are some private treatment facilities that deal with gaming addiction, and interest in the issue is growing amid a broader discussion about more general problematic technology use. But, rather than focus on the medical treatment for these issues, much of that effort has thus far been aimed at getting companies to change their behavior. Apple and Google have created new controls to limit technology use into their next operating systems, in response to broad concern about how frequently people are using their smartphones to play games and check other apps.