

Draft: Email from CEWG to UNM Epidemiologists

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You may remember the well-received presentation on the basics of epidemiology that you gave in March of 2008 at a meeting of the Community Environmental Working Group (CEWG) held at the Rio Rancho Public Schools Office. Stephen Littlejohn was our facilitator at that time.

Your joint presentation gave the CEWG useful insights into the work methods of environmental epidemiologists such as yourselves. The CEWG is now working to understand the methods and findings of a recent report issued by the New Mexico Department of Health entitled, "Investigation of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis in Corrales, NM, 2000-2015" (attached).

To understand the ALS report more fully, the CEWG has a particular question about the statistical methods of epidemiology. Can you help us? The report calculates prevalence rates for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) for a 16-year period. The data for comparison purposes are usually reported as annual prevalence rates. How does the prevalence for a 16-year period relate to the prevalence for the 16 annual rates over the same 16 years? Is the 16-year prevalence rate some sort of average of the 16 annual rates? Are there logical bounds on how widely the 16 annual rates could vary from the rate for the 16-year period? Can you clarify this point for us?

Any other comments you may have to give a clearer understanding of the findings will be much appreciated.

Thank you again for your help and your interest in our work.

- Very truly yours,
John Bartlit, Acting Chair, on behalf of the Community Environmental Working Group