

Better detection key to rising ALS cases in U.S.

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(HealthDay)—Better detection appears to explain the recent rise in the

number of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) cases in the United States, government health officials say.

It's unlikely that the rate of ALS—also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, named after the legendary baseball player who died from it—is actually increasing, says a new report from the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

According to the agency's National ALS Registry, the estimated ALS prevalence rate rose from 4.7 [cases](#) per 100,000 people in 2012 to 5 cases per 100,000 in 2013.

However, "it is likely the increased prevalence rate since the first report was issued does not reflect an actual increase in the number of ALS cases," said report lead author Dr. Paul Mehta, medical epidemiologist and principal investigator with the ALS Registry. "Rather, this increase is more attributable to better detection methods used to identify ALS cases, along with an increased public awareness of the registry."

The registry estimates the national prevalence for ALS using data from Medicare, Medicaid and the Veterans Health and Benefits Administrations. It reported 14,713 identified cases in 2012 and 15,908 identified cases in 2013.

ALS was more common among whites, males and people ages 60 to 69. Those with the lowest number of ALS cases were people ages 18 to 39 and those 80 and older, the researchers found.

ALS, a [progressive neurodegenerative disease](#), affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. Eventually, the brain loses the ability to control muscle movement. There is no cure.

In 2014, the disease gained much attention during a blockbuster

fundraiser known as the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, which went viral on social media and raised money and awareness.

The new study's findings are similar to those of long-established ALS registries in Europe and previous smaller-scale epidemiologic studies in the United States, the researchers said.

The study was published Aug. 4 in the *Weekly Morbidity and Mortality Report* from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

More information: For more about amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, visit the [ALS Association](#).

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