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Texas Preventable Disease

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NEWS

contents:
My Friend
Monthly Statistical Summary

**TEXAS STATE
DOCUMENTS COLLECTION**

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Commissioner

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**Bureau of Disease Control and Epidemiology,
1100 West 49th Street, Austin, Texas 78756 (512-458-7455)**

MY FRIEND*

Brett is intensely curious about the rapidly enlarging world about him. His probing curiosity about life stimulates the adults around him to inquire more actively about their own lives. He is like most other 3-year-olds, I think: full of delightful mischief, granting smiles without hesitation and rapidly retreating to tears at those times when life is just too much bigger than he is. And, like many children, he cannot conceal a certain charming, if smug, satisfaction as he masters each new developmental task. Those tasks often come hard for Brett.

Brett has many other friends. Some, such as I, are new friends. Others, such as Grandma, Grandpa, and Daddy, go way back to before the accident that he now pretends not to remember. The accident? Brett's mother and baby brother, Matthew, were killed by a drunk driver in a violent accident on a softly beautiful starlit evening last summer. I did not know the driver, but I know he had spent the day enjoying a party with friends and relatives. It was a day of happiness and sharing, of warmth and comradery. It was also a day of drinking.

I grew up in a home in which the consumption of alcohol was uncommon, but not condemned. Nevertheless, the importance of responsibility and the possible adverse consequences of drinking and driving were emphasized. I can still easily recite a litany of facts about alcohol consumption and driving: a quarter of a million Americans have died in alcohol-related accidents in the last decade; one American life is lost every 20 minutes in an alcohol-related accident; half of all Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related accident during their lifetimes; alcohol-related crashes are the leading cause of death among Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 years; 2,000 persons are injured each day in alcohol-related accidents; two million drunk-driving collisions occur each year; 80% of Americans drive after drinking; drunk drivers cost US tax payers in excess of \$20 billion annually; only about one in 1,000 drunk drivers on the road is arrested. I knew all this, but I really did not know anything about the human cost of drunk driving until I met my new friend Brett.

At least one person told the drunk driver he ought not drive, but the warning was waved off. No one stopped him and no one tried to save his life by preventing him from driving while he was so obviously drunk. He also died in the fiery crash, burned alive in the first few minutes after he wove repeatedly across the center line and crashed at 60 mph into the car carrying Brett.

Some might say that Brett is lucky: he suffered no brain damage. Intellectually he is quite alive -- I believe he will go to college one day. But Brett is paralyzed below the level of his second cervical vertebra. His arms and legs will never move. He cannot breathe at all on his own, nor will he--ever.

As a specialist in pediatric intensive care medicine, I see and care for many very severely ill and injured children. The jarring horror of my first moments with Brett ripped a still unrepaired hole in the wall of objectivity that usually protects me from the pain of seeing a seriously injured child.

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"He's not breathing," shouted the flight nurse over the scream of the engine as we unloaded the child from the helicopter and rushed into the emergency department. The neurosurgeon and I examined the form below us. The cherub was motionless, save for a grimace when we ventilated him by mask. "Can you open your eyes?" urged my colleague. When he did promptly open his eyes we both gasped, staring almost uncomprehendingly at one another, then back to the figure on the table. The frightened young eyes reached out so powerfully in their panic that we felt ourselves pulled to the child. The reality of the nearly unimaginable injury was upon us.

"Oh, God, it's his C-spine--this kid's a quad." The words were whispered. They would have been wholly unbearable if spoken any louder. Even gently whispered, those words conveyed a sentence of harsh finality known to all in the room, save one. A few slow, deep breaths and physicians and nurses resumed control and function: "We're sorry, Brett. You've been in a car accident. This is the hospital. We're doctors and nurses--we're going to help you, honey. Don't you have the most handsome blonde hair we've seen today? This is Tickle, our stuffed bear. Can he snuggle close by you? He loves little boys." Later, Brett and his father would cry together, as one generation struggled to be brave for the next, unable to soften the story that had to be shared.

A portable ventilator now breathes for Brett. The annual cost of providing his necessary medical and nursing care exceeds \$180,000. The man who caused the accident was uninsured. The cost in anguish and emotional pain for Brett's family and for the family of the drunk driver cannot be guessed. The lives of all involved will never be the same.

Although the police report assigned the responsibility for the accident to only one man, we are all to blame. Why do we share this burden? Because we have driven after drinking. Because we have welcomed friends into our homes, entertained them with alcohol, then waved them warmly into the night. Because we have laughed at and accepted public intoxication. Because we have tolerated weak and inconsistent enforcement of drunk driving laws. Because we have accepted lenient sentences for drunk drivers. Because we have conveniently ignored signs of alcoholism in our patients.

Perhaps we can only truly know that which we have experienced. My friendship with Brett has added much to my understanding of the realities of drunk driving and of life. Few intend to hurt or kill others, yet it happens, and the consequences fill our forevers.

I grieve with Brett for the mommy who can no longer kiss and hug away the hurts of childhood, and for the little brother who will not play with him. I share with him the emptiness of a football lying unthrown by the fireplace, of the unopened bag of marbles on the table beside his bed, of the laughing horseplay and the flirtations of young manhood that may never come.

Yet life goes on. I will not demean the resilience of man or child by ascribing to Brett extraordinary bravery or superhuman determination. He is, after all, a little boy. He still laughs and he still cries. He manipulates people and he likes french fries with lots of ketchup. He uses a computer masterfully with a mouth control that also enables him to drive his own wheelchair. Such is our nature, about which Brett has taught me so much: given the slightest toehold, we dig in and we grow and survive. That is our nature. Yet with the joy remains the sadness and a certain loss of innocence--even for the physicians who thought they already had the big picture. We survive, but the shocking ease with which beautiful things can be broken haunts us. Twenty-five thousand Americans die each year in auto accidents involving alcohol. Two of them are missed a great deal by my little friend Brett.

MONTHLY SUMMARY OF REPORTABLE DISEASES IN TEXAS

(Counties listed below reflect only those with populations of 100,000 or more, based on 1987 population estimates.)

Cumulative through: FEBRUARY 1988

County	Amebiasis	Campylobacteriosis	Chickenpox	Encephalitis	H. influenzae Infections	Hepatitis A	Hepatitis B	Hepatitis NA-NB	Influenza	Measles	Meningococcal Infections	Aseptic Meningitis	Mumps	Pertussis	Rubella	Salmonella	Shigella
BEXAR	6	2	148	0	7	8	2	0	1277	0	0	1	0	0	0	9	16
BRAZORIA	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CAMERON	4	0	36	0	0	8	1	0	287	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	3
COLLIN	0	0	6	0	0	1	1	0	374	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	2
DALLAS	3	4	283	1	34	53	21	2	899	0	5	9	4	0	0	7	21
DENTON	0	0	22	0	1	1	2	0	37	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
EL PASO	0	4	144	0	2	35	8	0	30	0	2	0	2	0	0	4	6
FORT BEND	0	2	10	0	2	0	2	0	113	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
GALVESTON	0	0	19	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	12
HARRIS	0	5	669	0	18	23	14	6	564	0	1	7	14	0	0	0	11
HIDALGO	2	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	18	2
JEFFERSON	0	0	21	0	1	2	1	0	564	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1
LUBBOCK	0	0	25	0	2	15	1	0	253	0	1	2	0	0	0	4	0
MCCLENNAN	0	0	73	0	1	10	3	1	337	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
MONTGOMERY	2	0	8	0	7	1	3	1	381	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
NEEDES	0	0	66	0	2	1	7	0	4924	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
TARRANT	0	6	320	0	13	26	20	4	952	0	4	4	2	0	0	13	2
TRAVIS	6	9	6	0	7	10	6	1	98	0	1	5	1	0	0	15	13
All Other Counties	9	52	940	1	36	72	43	5	21762	0	11	7	16	0	0	33	41
Cumulative TX 1988	32	84	2826	2	134	266	130	20	32852	0	25	37	47	0	0	118	138
Cumulative TX 1987	28	40	3789	12	133	312	202	25	27972	109	43	73	81	12	0	241	138

1988 CUMULATIVE TOTALS FOR OTHER REPORTABLE DISEASES:

Acute Occ. Pesticide Poisoning	1	Coccidioidomycosis	5	Histoplasmosis	6	Psittacosis	0	Toxic Shock Syndrome	2
Anthrax	0	Dengue	0	Legionellosis	0	Q Fever	0	Trichinosis	0
Asbestosis *	0	Diphtheria	0	Leptospirosis	0	Rabies	0	Tuberculosis	150
Botulism	0	+ Elevated Blood Lead Levels	156	Listeria Infections	9	Reye Syndrome	0	Tularemia	0
Brucellosis	1	Gonorrhea	6890	Lyme Disease	0	Rocky Mt Spotted Fever	0	Typhoid	0
Chlamydia trachomatis	1236	Hansen's Disease	2	Malaria	9	Silicosis *	0	Typhus, Murine	0
Cholera	0	Hepatitis D (Delta Agent)	0	Plague	1	Syphilis (PIS)	1045	Vibrio Infect.	0
		Hepatitis type unspecified	79	Polioomyelitis	0	Tetanus	0	Yellow Fever	0

* Blood lead level >40ug/dl in persons 15 years of age or older; summarized by date of blood lead test.

* Regular summaries of these reportable occupational diseases will be included as reporting procedures are better established.

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TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
 TEXAS AIDS CASES: WEEKLY SURVEILLANCE REPORT
 Case Count by Residence at Onset and Year of Diagnosis
 April 8, 1988

COUNTY *	1980-1985		1986		1987		1988		CUMULATIVE	
	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths
Bexar	52	42	43	24	38	8	0	0	133	74
Brazoria	8	8	9	4	7	2	2	0	26	14
Brazos	10	10	5	2	4	2	0	0	19	14
Dallas	246	228	293	196	427	180	50	14	1016	618
Denton	2	2	5	3	14	7	1	0	22	12
El Paso	5	5	8	5	17	4	1	0	31	14
Fort Bend	10	10	10	6	14	2	1	0	35	18
Galveston	11	9	15	10	19	6	2	1	47	26
Harris	602	521	586	377	641	176	44	3	1873	1077
Hidalgo	6	6	0	0	4	2	0	0	10	8

COUNTY	1980-1985		1986		1987		1988		Cumulative	
	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths
Jefferson	7	6	8	1	16	5	2	0	33	12
Lubbock	4	4	5	2	6	2	0	0	15	8
McLennan	2	1	5	2	4	1	0	0	11	4
Montgomery	5	5	3	1	8	3	1	0	17	9
Nueces	6	4	11	7	19	2	3	0	39	13
Orange	3	3	4	2	4	0	0	0	11	5
Tarrant	41	33	38	18	94	24	4	0	177	75
Travis	58	50	45	22	82	19	4	1	189	92
Walker **	9	9	15	6	11	3	2	0	37	18
All Others	59	52	88	48	120	43	5	1	272	144

STATEWIDE	1980-1985		1986		1987		1988		CUMULATIVE	
	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths	Cases	Deaths
	1146	1008	1196	736	1549	491	122	20	4013	2255
CFR %	CFR%	88	CFR%	62	CFR%	32	CFR%	16	CFR%	56

* COUNTIES LISTED INDIVIDUALLY ARE THOSE WITH A CUMULATIVE TOTAL OF 10+
 ** 27 CASES WERE DIAGNOSED WHILE TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION INMATES

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