



NEWS RELEASE

SHERIFF-CORONER DON BARNES

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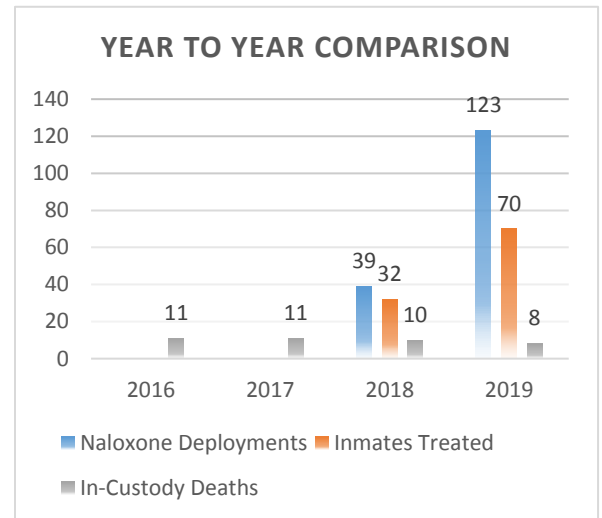
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Life-saving efforts spike while in-custody deaths decrease in OC jails

SANTA ANA, Ca. (January 14, 2020) – In 2019, custody and Correctional Health Services staff at the Orange County jail deployed Naloxone in an effort to save inmates' lives a record 123 times to 70 inmates. Compared to the 2018 totals of 39 deployments to 32 inmates, the jump in incidents has been significant. This marks a three-year high, a benchmark that reflects the alarming increase in opioid abuse and overdoses nationwide.

The drug epidemic in Orange County has impacted the number of inmate overdose and fentanyl exposures over the last three years. Despite the rise of suspected overdoses, the number of in-custody deaths among OC jail inmates has not increased.

In 2019, the total number of in-custody deaths totaled eight, as compared to 11 in 2016, 11 in 2017, and 10 in 2018. Contrary to a misperception of increased jail deaths, the proactive measures put in place have saved lives that may have otherwise been lost. In addition to overdoses, inmates have died from natural causes and conditions that existed prior to their time in custody. All Orange County Jail in-custody deaths are investigated by the Orange County District Attorney's Office.



Since 2017, the Orange County Sheriff's Department has worked to reduce the number of overdose deaths, both in custody and in the community, by training deputies to deploy Naloxone, an opioid antagonist designed to rapidly reverse opioid overdose. Efforts by Sheriff and Correctional Health personnel to train in and use Naloxone when they identify symptoms consistent with opioid overdose have been attributed to saving a number of inmate lives over the last year.

In addition, Orange County jail staff have focused much of their efforts to the detection and deterrence of drug trafficking. Alterations to policy aimed at eliminating drugs being mailed into the jail, increased use of custody canines, increased cell searches, and the procurement of additional body scanners similar to those used at airports are all examples of the increased effort.

“The number of lives saved speaks to the high level of care provided to inmates by deputies and health care staff,” said Sheriff Don Barnes, Orange County Sheriff-Coroner. “The marked increase in naloxone deployments also make clear the challenges of the opioid epidemic. Drug enforcement, education and substance abuse treatment are all critical parts of our strategy to reduce the prevalence of drugs in Orange County.”

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