



COUNTY OF ORANGE – HEALTH CARE AGENCY

# PRESS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release:** 8/15/17

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## Report Finds Opioid Overdoses in Orange County on the Rise

**(Santa Ana, CA)** – The OC Health Care Agency (HCA) today released the “Opioid Overdose and Death in Orange County” report. Among key findings: the rate of opioid-related emergency department (ED) visits has more than doubled since 2005.

“Drug overdose deaths involving prescription opioids have quadrupled since 1999 which is alarming,” said Chairwoman Michelle Steel, Second District Supervisor. “There must be a community effort of individuals, private and nonprofit organizations, and the government to reduce the number of people dying in this completely preventable manner.”

Vice Chair Andrew Do, First District Supervisor stated, “As a former prosecutor, I have seen firsthand what opioid abuse can do to a family and a community. The Board of Supervisors has taken an active step in preventing fatal overdoses by securing a grant to provide 6,218 doses of Naloxone in Orange County. While Naloxone won’t solve opioid abuse, it will enable us to save lives and prevent future overdoses.”

The report, which was developed in collaboration with the Orange County Sheriff’s Department’s Coroner Division (OCSD), also found:

- Between 2011 and 2015, there were 7,457 opioid overdose/abuse cases treated in Orange County ED’s.
- The rate of opioid-related ED visits has increased 141% since 2005 to 1,769 cases in 2015.
- Residents between the ages of 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 years were most likely to visit the ED for an opioid overdose.
- Seven of every 10 drug overdose death investigated by the OCSD during this five-year period involved opioids, for an average of 241 opioid-related overdose deaths each year.
- Males were nearly two times more likely than females to overdose and/or die from an opioid-related incident, and residents between the ages of 45 to 54 years had the highest opioid overdose death rates.

- Geographically, cities along the coastal and southern regions of Orange County (e.g., Laguna Beach, Laguna Woods, Dana Point, Costa Mesa, and Huntington Beach) tended to have higher rates of ED visits and death than other cities.

“Opioid abuse has serious consequences that impact emergency department productivity, criminal justice involvement, and health care expenses,” said Supervisor Todd Spitzer, Third District. “This report highlights the immediate need to address what is becoming a major public safety and quality of life issue in Orange County.”

“Seeing the rate of opioid-related emergency department visits nearly double in the last 12 years is troubling, to say the least,” said Supervisor Shawn Nelson, Fourth District. “This illustrates that opioid abuse is climbing to epidemic rates, not only in Orange County, but regionally.”

Encouragingly, the death rate due to opioid overdose has remained relatively level over this time-period and Orange County has lower opioid mortality rates compared to other states and the nation. HCA offers a variety of public education, prevention, outreach and treatment services aimed at reducing the misuse and abuse of drugs and alcohol among residents. In addition, the Orange County Alcohol and Drug Advisory Board is also developing an Opioid Strategic Plan that will identify individual and community needs in Orange County specific to opioids as well as effective strategies to address them.

“Even one opioid overdose in Orange County is too many,” said Supervisor Lisa Bartlett, Fifth District. “It’s particularly concerning to me that the highest rates of emergency department visits related to opioid abuse occurred in southern and coastal cities in the Fifth District. Armed with the knowledge provided by this in-depth report, we must collaborate to eradicate opioid abuse in our community.”

To access the report in its entirety, the corresponding story map or additional information and resources, please visit [www.ochealthinfo.com/opioids](http://www.ochealthinfo.com/opioids).

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