

Most casinos in South Florida refuse to close during COVID-19 pandemic

Written by Administrator
Monday, 16 March 2020 20:55 -

MIAMI – With territorial sovereignty, even if the government ordered The Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood to close, management wouldn't have to do it.

According to Gary Bitner, a spokesman for the casino, poker rooms are closing at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, shows and gathering events have been postponed, some slot machines have been turned off to create space among gamblers and the number of players at all table games is limited.

"Team members may stay home and use paid time off, even if they have a zero balance of paid time off," Bitner wrote in a statement.

Public health officials say these measures are not enough. Most casinos in South Florida are ignoring Monday's new federal public health guideline warning that to help reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic casinos must close.

The Calder Casino in Miami Gardens and the Casino at Gulfstream Park in Hallandale Beach are exceptions. The Calder Casino is closed for two weeks and Gulfstream will close at 10 p.m. Monday.

The Associated Press

FILE - In this June 20, 2019 file photo, a roulette dealer waits for bets to be placed at the Hard Rock casino in Atlantic City, N.J. Hard Rock is canceling live entertainment at all its U.S. properties for 30 days in response to the coronavirus outbreak, one of many steps casinos around the country are taking in response to the outbreak. (AP Photo/Wayne Parry) (Copyright 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.)

Gamblers and vacationers who had planned to visit U.S. casinos expressed a mixture of disappointment and relief over a wave of closings in at least 15 states as officials worked on slowing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Some said they still plan to visit casinos.

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Many casinos, where hundreds or even thousands of people touch the same slot machines and gambling chips, remain open. The casinos that remain open say they are stepping up cleaning and sanitization efforts.

Sherry Giordano, an Atlantic City casino regular from Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, has a trip booked for this weekend that will be canceled. But she would have been hesitant to go even if the casinos had been open, because of her husband's health history that could make him more susceptible to the virus.

"I'm less concerned with my own safety, and I think a lot of people have a tendency to think that way, which is both kind of stupid and selfish because we can endanger others," she said. "I not only love gambling, I love meeting people and escaping reality."

"Atlantic City is very important to me and my husband," she said. "But I think it's the right thing to do. I would rather err (on the side of) caution rather than jeopardize a life."

For most people, the virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death. The vast majority of people recover.

Troy Wildasin, an Emmaus, Pennsylvania, casino patron, said that even in the best of times, the sanitary state of casinos left a lot to be desired.

"Not only would this help the chance of decreasing the virus outbreak, but this will also give the opportunity to give the casinos a fresh cleanup," he said. "There is not one casino, regardless of city, that is clean. Hard to do properly when they are open 24/7."

Michael Magbaleta, of Jersey City, New Jersey, frequents casinos in Atlantic City, Las Vegas and Pennsylvania, but said he won't be going in the near future.

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"I'd feel a bit antsy and paranoid going on a casino trip now," he said "As it is, Wind Creek at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, closed down, and they have a huge customer base traveling from New York City to that resort. I'm glad they are taking extreme measures to protect the employees and public."

Sherry Cannon of Toledo, Ohio, is canceling a Las Vegas trip planned for mid-May.

"I am not comfortable going to any casino any where in the world right now," she said. "It makes me sad, but I would rather myself and my 80-year-old mother stay alive and not spread anything to anyone else. I am glad the casino here in Toledo closed, and I'm happy the ones in Detroit closed because if they hadn't, my mom would be trying to get me to go!"

Don Battista of Austin, Texas, was due to fly to Laughlin, Nevada, this week, but has since thought better of it.

"Our group decided while we are not elderly, and all healthy, it would be irresponsible to possibly spread to someone in that danger range," he said.

Shelly Bittner plans to leave Breezewood, Pennsylvania, in early April to visit Las Vegas, virus or no virus.

"We still plan on going unless they stop the planes from flying," she said. "Just use common sense. Wash your hands, and use sanitizer."

The shutdowns could be a boon to casinos in states where internet gambling is legal, including New Jersey, where online gambling revenue has been soaring for years.

On Monday, New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy ordered the closure of Atlantic City's nine casinos as of 8 p.m., after days of allowing them to remain open. The governors of New York and Connecticut did likewise, also including bars, restaurants and movie theaters.

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As of Monday, casino closures also had been implemented or announced in Maryland, Nevada, Michigan, New Mexico, California, Alabama, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania and New York.

In Canada, casinos in Ontario closed at 4 a.m. Monday after authorities ordered a shutdown.

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