

Mississippi casinos to reopen before Memorial Day weekend

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GULFPORT, Miss. -- The Mississippi Gaming Commission said Thursday that casinos in the state can start reopening May 21 — more than two months after the commission closed them because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The reopening is allowed just before the Memorial Day weekend, which usually marks the beginning of the summer tourist season.

Gaming Commission executive director Allen Godfrey confirmed the reopening date to WLOX-TV and the Sun Herald. He said the commission will release an order Friday with safety guidelines, which are expected to include requirements for social distancing between customers and frequent cleaning of slot machines and other equipment.

The commission closed Mississippi's state-regulated casinos March 16. Republican Gov. Tate Reeves has closed other types of businesses to try to slow the spread of the highly contagious virus, and he has allowed many to reopen. He said Thursday that the commission makes the “final and official” decision about reopening casinos.

In neighboring Louisiana, casinos can start reopening in most places Monday, but they must remain closed in New Orleans.

Several casinos on the Mississippi Gulf Coast have been moving slot machines and table games to meet social distancing guidelines.

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Palace Casino Resort General Manager Keith Crosby told WLOX that the Biloxi resort will suspend gaming activity every day from 3 a.m. to 8 a.m. to disinfect the casino. Plexiglass shields have been installed at every casino cage, sportsbook, cashier and front desk location. Hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes will be available throughout the resort.

Casinos will have to call in employees and make arrangements for food delivery.

“Give us the word and give us three to four days and we’ll be ready,” Chett Harrison, general manager at Golden Nugget Casino in Biloxi, told the Sun Herald.

Many casino operators say they have brought in cleaning staff to sanitize and maintenance crews to make repairs and improvements. Workers at Scarlet Pearl Casino Resort in D’Iberville are building a new high-limits area near the main casino floor. Greg Bosarge, chief financial officer, said it will be ready soon after the casino reopens.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>.

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