

## Preparing the palace: How an iconic Las Vegas casino plans to conquer COVID-19

Written by Administrator  
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LAS VEGAS, Nevada -- At the heart of a nearly vacant Las Vegas Strip, Caesar's iconic palace stands empty.

The hotel's doors are locked for the first time in its storied 54-year history.

The casino floor is nearly as silent as its statues, save for the siren song auto-playing from a few slot machines echoing through the polished halls.

It's been the worst experience of Tony Rodio's 40-year casino career. Now, the CEO of Caesars Entertainment is undertaking the Herculean task of safely reopening the 85-acre resort in the era of COVID-19, he told CNN.

"People want to get back to normal again. It's just going to be a process getting there," Rodio said.

The initiative at Caesars Palace is among at least four reopening plans unveiled so far by Las Vegas resort operators itching to serve tourists again while getting employees back to work, even as trade unions demand more transparency and the adoption of their own safety guidelines. Plans by MGM Resorts, Wynn Resorts and The Venetian include potentially modifying HVAC systems, suspending buffet service and setting protocols for what to do if a coronavirus test comes back positive.

While states begin to implement phased reopening plans, the Nevada Gaming Commission is laying out its agenda to safely bring Sin City back from economic hell. The gaming control board on Thursday released guidelines for reopening casino restaurants, but there's still no word on when the gaming can begin.

### [Thunderbirds fly over Southern California saluting front line workers](#)

At Caesars Palace, card tables, dice games and even slot machines are being retooled across the casino floor with social distancing and disinfection in mind, Rodio explained.

"We will be deactivating every other slot machine and removing the stool from the game," he said, standing at a darkened slot machine at the center of three-machine row. "A customer

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can't even stand here and play this game because the game's not even active, and so we will do that throughout the whole floor."

At card tables, the number of seats will be reduced from six to three, he said. And say goodbye to the classic casino scene of a crowd cheering a winning streak.

"Nobody will be able to be within 6 feet of any of the three customers that are playing," Rodio said. "You're certainly not face-to-face."

The changes are being implemented as luck is running out for casino staff. Caesars Entertainment's says 90% of its 60,000 worldwide employees have been furloughed or laid off.

### **New rules are a gamble in themselves**

With no reliable reservations on the books and few remaining staff on site, it's hard to imagine how future revelers and the army of workers who serves them will take to a new set of rules.

Las Vegas Mayor Carolyn Goodman has repeatedly called for the city's businesses to reopen but refused to provide guidelines on how they should do so safely. "They better figure it out," she said last month, referring to business owners. "That's their job. That's not the mayor's job."

Throughout Caesars Palace, large red signs posted remind guests to remain 6 feet apart and encourages -- but doesn't require -- them to wear masks.

Employees will be held to stricter requirements -- including masks during shifts and daily temperature checks. "They'll also be asked to complete a questionnaire before they returned to work for the first time to see if they have anything that would lead us to want to get them tested," Rodio said.

As for the Sisyphean task of sanitation, "we have more than enough decks of cards, so we'll be

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changing out the decks of cards a more frequently," Rodio said.

The dice on craps tables will be cleaned after each roll, and the chips will be frequently sanitized, too, he said. For larger surfaces such as slot machines and elevator banks, employees will be equipped with electronic sprayers.

Guests checking in to one of the 3,960 rooms will be able to use kiosks instead of the front desk, and cleaning staff will not enter rooms during guests' stay, Rodio said.

"So, you begin to see us moving, you know, taking a small step, but a very important step, back towards normalcy," Rodio said.

The powerful Las Vegas culinary union held a rolling protest Tuesday night to demand gaming operators reopen safely. Hundreds of cars lined the strip, with hospitality workers and their families honking and waving signs that read, "Don't gamble with workers' lives," and "Don't roll the dice with our safety."

Workers are demanding more transparency from casinos on plans to reopen and asking Nevada's governor to adopt unions' safety protocols.

For now, the steps being take a Caesars Palace are among the first in an odyssey towards a new casino culture, one its leaders believe will retain the spirit of Las Vegas.

"I can't tell you when we're going to get back to 100% normal, but I'm confident that we'll get there," Rodio said. "I think that it will be in 2021 at some point."

**Read more** <https://abc7.com/caesars-palace-strip-vegas-casino/6189465/>