



March 31, 2020

Emerald Queen Casino to remain closed at least 2 more weeks

Closure to be re-evaluated regularly; 1-5 operations expected to move into new \$450 million casino upon reopening

The Puyallup Tribe's Emerald Queen Casino locations will stay closed for at least two more weeks to help slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

"We did not come to this decision quickly or lightly," said the Puyallup Tribal Council, the Tribe's governing body. "We have looked at the situation from every angle. After long deliberation and consideration of all options, we believe this was a decision that had to be made."

The casinos shut down March 17 for an initial two-week period. During those two weeks, Tribal Council said employees would not experience a disruption in wages or benefits. The casinos employ about 2,400 people. During the continued shutdown, about 12 percent of employees are being laid off and about 73 percent are going on furlough. Employees will keep their medical benefits while on furlough and will be able to file for unemployment. Most employees were notified by March 31. Some remaining employees have taken voluntary pay cuts.

The Tribe is Pierce County's seventh-largest employer, with more than 3,000 employees among the casinos, Tribal government, Puyallup Tribal Health Authority and various business enterprises.

The Puyallup Tribal Council, the Tribe's governing body, said Council, casino managers and medical professionals will re-evaluate conditions regularly to determine how soon the casinos can re-open while also protecting customers' and employees' safety.

The Tribe owns two casinos, one on Pacific Highway in Fife and one on East 29th Street in Tacoma. When the Tacoma operation is ready to resume, it is expected to shift to the Tribe's new \$450 million, 310,000-square-foot location at 2920 E. R. St.

Government operations

The COVID-19 outbreak has affected Tribal government as well. Emerald Queen Casino provides most of the funding for government operations, including vital services to the membership.

Although Governor Jay Inslee's various stay-at-home orders do not apply to the Tribe, a sovereign nation, Tribal Council has coordinated with local, county and state authorities to present a united front against the virus.

With the voluntary shutdown of casino operations, Tribal Council has curtailed government operations with an emphasis on continuing essential services to Tribal members. Government buildings are now closed to the public, and Council has been meeting daily to analyze finances and determine additional steps to conserve resources. Tribal Councilmembers have found it necessary to take voluntary pay cuts.

"The Tribe is committed to providing services to our membership, direct and indirect," Tribal Council said.

Tribal members may check the Tribe's website – PuyallupTribe-nsn.gov – or call the main switchboard – (253) 573-7800 – for questions about services. Questions about casino operations should be directed to the Emerald Queen switchboard: (253) 594-7777.

Latest decision in a long timeline

Tribal Council has monitored the COVID-19 outbreak since before March and taken numerous actions to protect the tribal community and help slow the spread of the virus.

- **Feb. 29:** Governor Inslee proclaims a state of emergency in Washington State.
- **March 5:** All community events organized by Tribal Administration canceled through the end of March. The events include Elders luncheons, prayer breakfasts and cultural classes. Non-essential travel by employees canceled. About a week later, the state begins limiting large gatherings. The Tribe's cancellations are later extended into April.
- **March 10:** Attendance at ceremony to bless two story poles at Emerald Queen Casino I-5 is restricted to avoid an active construction zone, but also with COVID-19 in mind.
- **March 12:** Council decides to close Chief Leschi Schools and Grandview Early Learning Center effective March 16 through April 24. The school arranges for meal delivery and at-home learning options for students.
- **March 13:** Tribal Council contacts Governor Inslee and Pierce County Executive Bruce Dammeier and offers the Emerald Queen Riverboat and its adjacent 45 acres on Alexander Avenue to public health authorities as a possible isolation site or command center if needed.
- **March 17:** Emerald Queen Casino locations close for at least two weeks, and non-essential government operations are curtailed. Puyallup Tribal Court temporarily closes to the public; most staff work remotely, and most hearings scheduled until May 1 are continued. Tribal Council primary election – then still scheduled for April 4 but later moved to June 6 – is moved from in-person voting at Tribal Administration to drive-in voting Chief Leschi Schools.
- **March 18:** Tribal Council declares a public health emergency.

- **March 24:** Tribal Council, which has been coordinating with Governor Inslee’s office on COVID-19, again encourages Tribal community members to stay home except for essential activities and endorses Inslee’s “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” message.
- **March 27:** Postponement of Tribal Council primary election from April 4 to June 6, and of the general election from June 6 to Aug. 1
- **March 29:** Tribe’s first local case of COVID-19 announced
- **March 30:** Tribe decides to keep casinos closed at least two more weeks

Also in March, the House of Respect Residence stopped accepting visitors to better protect Elders living there. Puyallup Tribal Health Authority has adjusted its procedures and hours to better protect patients and staff. Tribal Council has encouraged members of the community to stay home unless undertaking essential activities and to pay seek out accurate, authoritative sources of information on COVID-19.

Accurate, trustworthy information

“We look to health experts when we make decisions,” Tribal Council said. “You should, too.”

Below is a list of accurate sources of information:

- Puyallup Tribal Health Authority: <https://www.epta.com/covid-19/>
- The Washington State Department of Health: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>
- Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department: <https://www.tpchd.org/healthy-people/human-coronavirus>
- The federal Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

For updates from Tribal government, including operational status and contacts for essential services, visit the Tribe’s official website: <http://www.puyalluptribe-nsn.gov/>

“COVID-19 is a fluid situation,” Tribal Council said. “The news changes daily, sometimes by the hour. As we learn more and make more decisions, we’ll get the right information to our Tribal membership, employees and community as soon as we can.”

About the Puyallup Tribe of Indians

The Puyallup People have lived along the shores of what is now called Puget Sound since time immemorial. The Puyallup Tribe of Indians is a sovereign nation of more than 5,000 members and one of the largest employers in Pierce County. It serves its people and neighbors with generosity and is committed to building a sustainable way of life for future generations. [Learn more about the Puyallup Tribe.](#)

About the Puyallup Tribal Council

The Puyallup Tribal Council is the elected governing body of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians. The council consists of Chairman David Z. Bean, Vice Chairman Bill Sterud, Sylvia Miller, Tim Reynon, Annette Bryan, James Rideout and Anna Bean.

###

Contact:

Lisa Pemberton, Content Manager, Puyallup Tribe of Indians, (253) 331-5453;

lisa.pemberton@puyalluptribe-nsn.gov

Michael Thompson, Communications Director, Puyallup Tribe of Indians, (253) 382-6200;

michael.thompson@puyalluptribe-nsn.gov