

SPORTS

# New York golf courses can reopen with coronavirus restrictions

By Brett Cyrgalis

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Golfers on the 1st hole at Dyker Beach Golf Course in early April.

J.C.Rice

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Golf courses have been in a gray area since New York State shut down non-essential businesses last month. At first, some were open and [bustling on nice days](#), finding ways to encourage social distancing, while others were fully shuttered, with no way of making that possible.

Then, Gov. Andrew Cuomo, on April 9, [added golf courses to the list](#) of non-essential businesses, shutting them down. The governor's top aide, Melissa DeRosa, said playing golf was "counter to the message" the state was trying to send regarding everyone staying home and obeying social distancing.

After what surely was a lot of pleading from one of the many seasonal industries being crushed by the coronavirus pandemic, the state altered its guidance on Friday by saying that golf courses could remain open — with some restrictions.

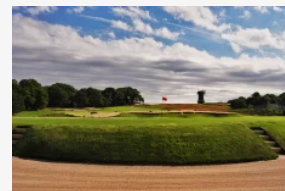
According to [the guidelines set forth](#) by the Empire State Development, the state authority in charge of determining essential and non-essential businesses, golf courses are still considered non-essential, so they are not allowed to have any employees working. But they can use “essential services, such as groundskeeping to avoid hazardous conditions; and security, provided by employees, contractors, or vendors.”

For a golf course with daily greens fees, this likely means the fee would have to be paid online. It’s hard to think that a “security” guard or greenskeeper could ostensibly be considered a sales clerk.

For private courses, the rule says they “may permit individuals access to the property so long as there are no gatherings of any kind and appropriate social distancing of six feet between individuals is strictly abided.” The presumption there would be that the “security” enforces those rules.

A lot of public golf courses are either owned by the state — like the five courses at Bethpage Park on Long Island, including the famed Black Course — or by individual townships. The state rules also said that “parks and other open public spaces” are open, “except playgrounds and other areas of congregation where social distancing cannot be abided.”

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Golf courses tried to stay open early on by doing things like raising cups an inch or two out of the ground, or putting styrofoam inside the cup, so the ball doesn’t go all the way down. This way, the flagstick can stay in and doesn’t have to be touched. The use of motorized carts were also stopped, as were caddies.

So golfers either carrying their own bags or using wheeled push-carts were allowed, and it was possible to maintain social distancing rules and still play. That is now possible yet again, and the rules must be strictly followed in order to keep golf courses open.

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