

DERBY FUN

Churchill Downs announces 'all-inclusive' tickets, social distancing for 2021 Kentucky Derby

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Churchill Downs announced 'all-inclusive' tickets for the 2021 Kentucky Derby as well several precautions in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

In a letter sent to Churchill Downs patrons Thursday, the company announced it will be introducing several protocols at the event, which is still scheduled for the first Saturday in May. They include social distancing rules, limited capacities and a mask mandate.

Guests must wear masks at all times indoors and outdoors while at the facilities, except to eat or drink. The capacity limit is unclear.

"Currently we are planning for a capacity in line with today's protocols; however, we are hopeful that we may be able to extend seating options for additional guests as we get closer to the 2021 Derby and Oaks dates," the letter said.

To enforce social distancing, there will be floor decals and signs throughout the spaces.

Attendees must agree to these rules to be admitted for entry. Those who do not comply will first receive a warning, and on a second occurrence, be escorted from the property and will not receive a refund, the letter said.

These changes also apply to the Kentucky Oaks on April 30, 2021.

The company will also be offering all-inclusive tickets this year for reserved seating, which includes clubhouse boxes, grandstand boxes & bleachers. Tickets for these seats will include food and beverages to cut down on lines and limit cash exchanges.

Tickets are nonrefundable and commemorative tickets will be replaced by mobile tickets, the letter said.

Churchill Downs enforced new coronavirus protocols in late November, but they are set to expire on Dec. 12.

Some of these include requiring masks for those over the age of five, prohibiting eating and drinking indoors, closing indoor dining and concession services, closing the box office and entry gates once at capacity and only issuing mobile tickets.

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In late October, Churchill Downs CEO Bill Carstanjen said the track was moving forward with plans to run the next Kentucky Derby on the first Saturday in May with limited fans.

As many as 82,500 fans could be allowed inside Churchill Downs for the 2021 Kentucky Derby next May.

“We are starting with the assumption that we will limit the number of reserved seats to 40% to 50% of capacity, and we will delay selling any general admission tickets ... until we are closer to the date of the Derby,” Carstanjen previously said.

Churchill Downs has a regular capacity of 165,000.

Carstanjen also said previously that Churchill officials “don’t anticipate moving” the traditional first Saturday in May date for 2021, and plans for ticket sales could change as news surrounding the pandemic changes.

“If and as the circumstances surrounding the pandemic improve, then we will sell more reserved seats and consider selling general admission tickets,” Carstanjen previously said.

The 2020 Kentucky Derby was moved this year from May 2 to Sept. 5 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 146th Kentucky Derby was held without fans and was not run on the first Saturday in May for the first time since 1945, when it was held on June 9 amid World War II.

A limited number of owners, other horse connections and media were allowed in the grandstand Sept. 5 as the Bob Baffert-trained Authentic won the 146th running of the Derby.

This story will be updated.

Courier Journal reporter Jason Frakes contributed to this report.