

June/2020



# **GAMBLING WITH CASINO WORKERS' HEALTH**

A Research Report



UNITEHERE!

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNITE HERE Local 1 surveyed 219 workers at four casinos – three in Northwest Indiana and one nearby in Joliet, Illinois – about their healthcare and health-related working conditions.

Workers at three of the casinos – Blue Chip Casino in Michigan City, Majestic Star Casino in Gary, and Hollywood Casino in Joliet – have access to the UNITE HERE Health plan. Workers at Ameristar Casino in East Chicago do not allow its employees to have UNITE HERE Health and may purchase the casino’s health insurance.

Rates of health insurance coverage were similar at all four casinos, ranging from 85.7% of respondents at Hollywood to 95.2% of respondents at Majestic Star who reporting having health insurance.

But at Ameristar respondents reported higher rates of reliance on public health insurance for themselves and their dependents, and higher levels of medical debt.

In addition, 42.5% of all respondents reported not having enough workers on their shift. Reports of under-staffing were highest among respondents who work at Hollywood (65.7%) and Ameristar (56.7%) – both operated by Penn National Gaming.

<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Respondents with dependent children whose children are insured through public insurance</b>	<b>Respondents with medical debt who reported having \$1,000 or more in medical debt</b>	<b>Respondents Reporting Not Enough Workers To Do The Assigned Work On Their Shift</b>
<b>Ameristar Casino</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>62.5%</b>	<b>56.7%</b>
<b>Blue Chip Casino</b>	<b>26.2%</b>	<b>53.3%</b>	<b>36.3%</b>
<b>Hollywood Casino</b>	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>56.5%</b>	<b>65.7%</b>
<b>Majestic Star Casino</b>	<b>34.2%</b>	<b>54.7%</b>	<b>31.7%</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>31.7%</b>	<b>55.6%</b>	<b>42.5%</b>

Meanwhile, casino companies have reported record earnings and were flush with cash heading into the pandemic.

The operator of Ameristar East Chicago, Penn National Gaming, is coming off a historic 2019 in which it “exceeded \$5.3 billion in revenue, \$1.6 billion in EBITDAR and 30% EBITDAR margins for the first time in our company’s history,” according to Penn CEO Jay Snowden.<sup>1</sup> Penn reported \$730 million in cash on hand as of March 31, 2020.<sup>2</sup>

When they return to work, casino workers will be on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Casino companies can afford to invest in the enhanced cleaning and safety measures necessary to keep workers safe.

Keeping casino workers safe means:

**1. Affordable Health Insurance.**

Workers must be able to afford medical care for ourselves and our families.

**2. Recall rights and *voluntary* return to work.**

Workers must have the option to return to work with their seniority and benefits intact. But they also should be able to stay home and take care of their families if they do not feel safe returning to work.

**3. Hazard pay.**

Extra risk deserves extra compensation.

**4. Quarantine pay.**

When casino workers are sick or have a condition that makes them more vulnerable to getting severely ill if infected with Covid-19, they must be paid to stay home.

**5. Training Partnership.**

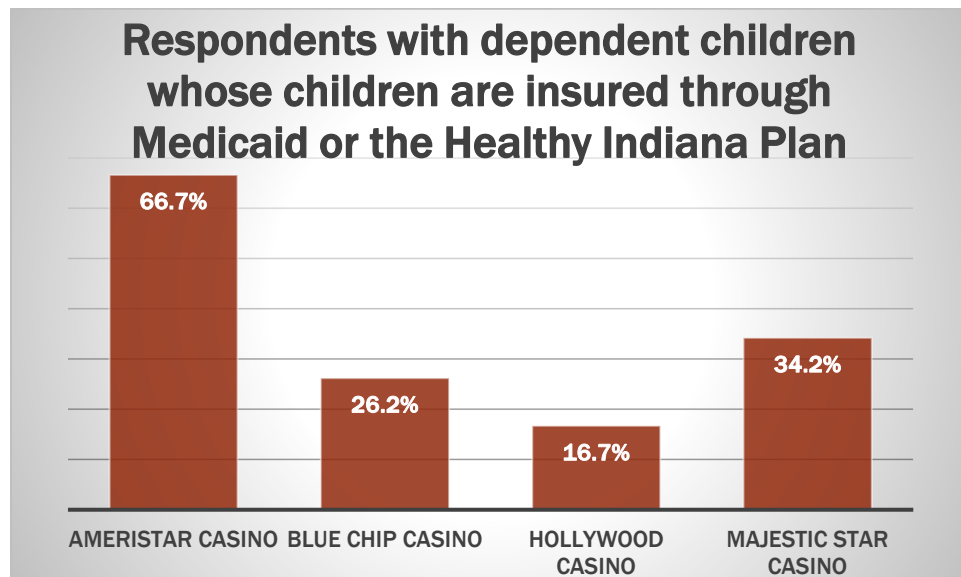
Starting with casino workers, everyone responsible for casino operations should be trained on COVID-19 safety and cleaning standards, guided by public health scientists with expertise and experience in our industry. We believe training is most effective when done as a partnership between employees and management.

# Survey Results

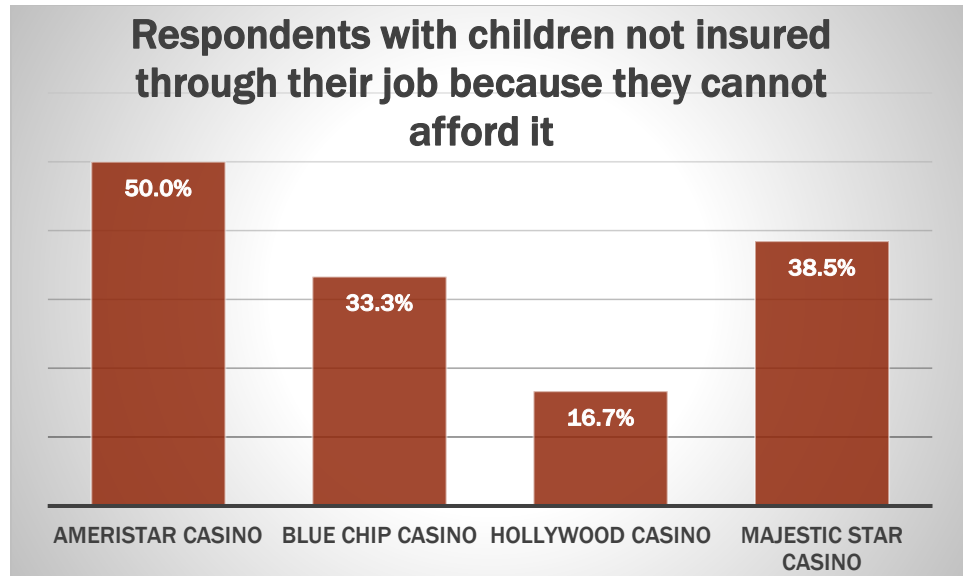
## Reliance on Public Health Insurance

101 or 46.1% of respondents have dependent children under 26. These “respondent parents” reported the source of health insurance for their children (including multiple sources for different children within the same family). Overall, 31.7% of respondent parents reported Medicaid or the Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP) as the source of health insurance for their dependent children.

At Ameristar 66.7% of respondent parents reported relying on Medicaid or HIP for their children’s health insurance. Ameristar’s rate is more than twice as much as the overall figure (31.7%) and nearly double the rate at Majestic Star (34.2%).

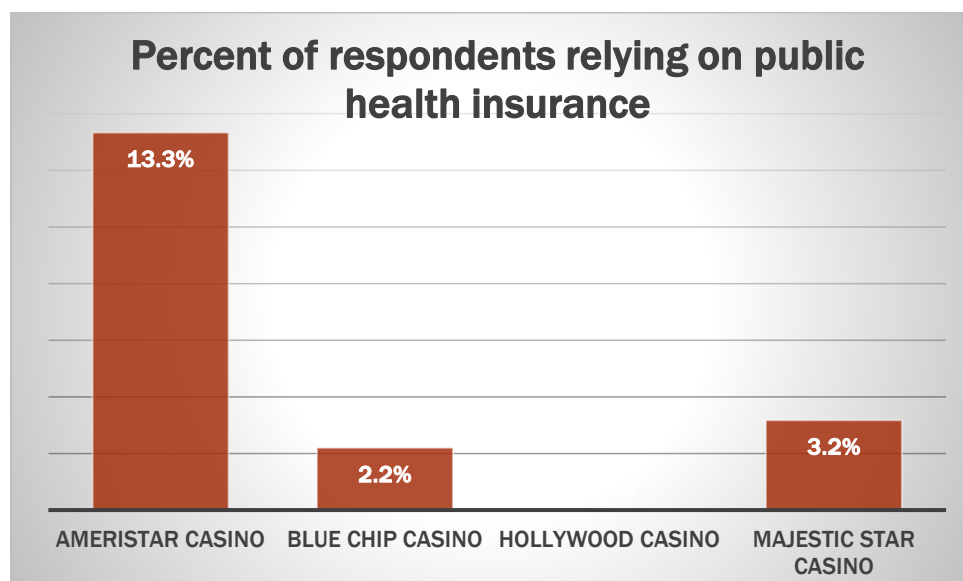


50.0% of respondent parents at Ameristar reported that their children were not insured through work because they could not afford their employer’s health insurance – far higher than the same figure for all four casinos (36.2%) or at Majestic Star (38.5%), the second-highest rate.



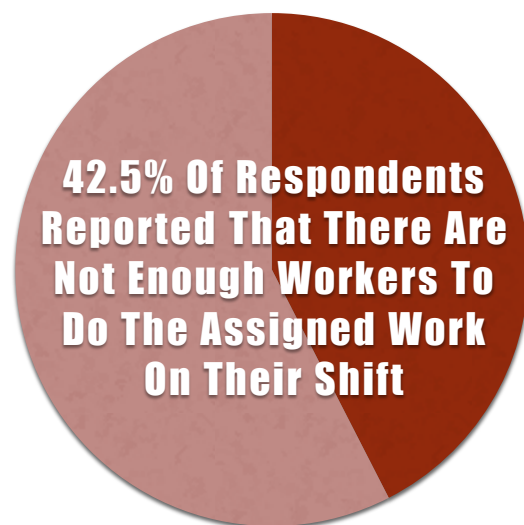
A small share of casino workers reported relying on Medicaid or the HIP for their own health insurance – particularly at Ameristar, where workers do not have UNITE HERE health insurance. At Ameristar 13.3% of respondents reported relying on public health insurance – more than four times that of Majestic Star (3.2%), the second-highest rate.

In a follow-up interview, a respondent from Ameristar East Chicago stated that “Five years ago Ameristar took away our union health insurance and put in place Ameristar’s health insurance. I cannot afford Ameristar’s health insurance so I am on the Healthy Indiana Plan and my boys are on Medicaid.”

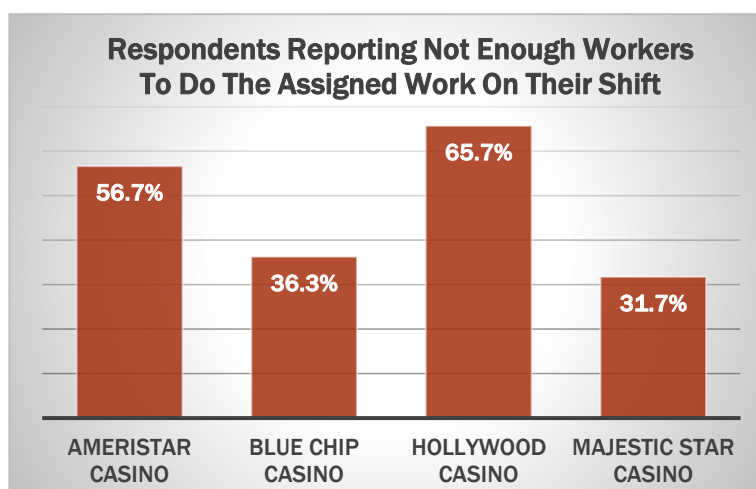


# Understaffing

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way casinos operate. The Indiana Gaming Commission's Health and Safety Guidelines for Reopening of Casino Operations calls for "enhanced regular cleaning and disinfecting."<sup>3</sup> The guidelines state that "every effort should be made to disinfect each machine as a patron ceases play there. Objects touched with high frequency, such as ATM's and counters, should be disinfected as often as feasible."<sup>4</sup> Casinos will have to schedule enough workers to carry out "enhanced regular cleaning and disinfecting."



Survey results indicate that prior to shutting down, staffing levels across all four casinos were not sufficient. Overall, 42.5% of casino workers surveyed reported not having enough workers on their shifts to do the assigned work. Respondents at Hollywood and Ameristar, which are both operated by Penn National Gaming, were the most likely to report under-staffing on their work shifts. 65.7% Hollywood respondents and 56.7% of Ameristar respondents reported not having enough workers to do the assigned work on their shifts.



Respondents who reported not having enough workers to do the assigned work on their shifts, also explained the impacts of under-staffing. In addition to increased physical and mental stress, respondents noted how under-staffing prevents them from getting their work done:

**"We do double work for not enough money. We can't do our jobs as good as we should."**

- Respondent from Ameristar Casino

**"Have to do shortcuts in order to get some things done"**

- Respondent from Hollywood Casino

**"The work is not done the way it should be done."**

- Respondent from Ameristar Casino

**"Because we have to hurry and things don't get the attention it should."**

- Respondent from Hollywood Casino

# The Path to COVID-Safe Casinos

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## About the Survey

UNITE HERE Local 1 surveyed 219 or 23.4% of the workers it represents at four casinos: Ameristar Casino in East Chicago, Blue Chip Casino in Michigan City, Hollywood Casino in Joliet, and Majestic Star Casino in Gary.

Workplace	Workers Surveyed	Total Bargaining Unit Workers
Ameristar East Chicago	30	133
Blue Chip Casino	91	445
Hollywood Casino Joliet	35	114
Majestic Star Casino	63	245
Total	219	937

Survey respondents work in the casinos as servers, bussers, bartenders, cooks, housekeeping room attendants, environmental services public area attendants, custodians/groundskeepers, kitchen utility workers, bellman, valet, cashiers and hosts/hostesses, snack bar attendants, and laundry attendants.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Penn National Gaming 4Q 2019 Earnings Call, January 29, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Penn National Gaming 1Q 2019 Earnings Call, May 7, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Indiana Gaming Commission's Health and Safety Guidelines for Reopening of Casino Operations, updated June 6, 2020 <https://www.in.gov/igc/files/IGC%20Health%20and%20Safety%20Guidelines%20for%20Reopening%20Casino%20Operations.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Indiana Gaming Commission's Health and Safety Guidelines for Reopening of Casino Operations, updated June 6, 2020 <https://www.in.gov/igc/files/IGC%20Health%20and%20Safety%20Guidelines%20for%20Reopening%20Casino%20Operations.pdf>