



## What's Next for Online Poker Players?

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Online poker players in the U.S. were shaken on April 15 when the federal government shut down the country's three biggest poker websites. Suddenly, players were without their favorite sites and could not access the funds that they kept there. Now, players are beginning to pick up the pieces. Since there is no federal law against playing online poker, only against the poker operators and banks processing funds in the United States, many are seeking to return to the game. But with the largest, safest, and most reputable options eliminated, what's next for online poker players?

### Funds

The Department of Justice announced on April 20 that all implicated poker companies are free to reimburse players' deposited funds, and that the DOJ would facilitate this process. While the companies' domain names were seized by the federal government, two of the three affected websites — PokerStars and Full Tilt — are currently operational in the United States for the limited purpose of processing players' withdrawals. The third poker operator, Absolute Poker, has not yet announced a similar agreement with the DOJ but has issued a statement indicating that player refunds are its "top priority."

A statement issued by PokerStars assured players that their deposits are kept separate from the company's operating funds and are completely safe.

Players can already cash out through PokerStars' website, although processing and delivery of funds may be delayed due to the expected high volume of requests. Full Tilt is expected to announce its plans for players' withdrawal of funds as well. In the end, all players are expected to receive a full refund of the funds they had in their accounts at the time the websites were shut down.

### Alternate websites

Players are now seeking out other online poker sites on which to play cash games; however their options are largely limited to small sites with unproven reliability, especially in the volumes that such sites are likely to receive in light of the shutdown. Transitioning to a new website can be challenging for any player who is loyal to a particular website but it is likely to be especially difficult now as players try to navigate a myriad of smaller sites to determine which are legitimate operators with sufficient security and reliability, and which are fly-by-night underground operations that may seek to take advantage of the current hole in the market and the players affected by it.



Players should always be cautious in investing money on sites with unproven reliability and to do their research before playing. Even if the website is reliable and secure, however, DOJ can still shut it down at any time.

### **Live tables**

Some players may now try to transition from online play to live games at casinos. For many players who don't live near casinos this is not a feasible option. Even for those who do, the transition to live tables may not be easy since the style of play in online poker is radically different from that of a live table game. Additionally, many professional players who make their living online do so by playing multiple games at once. Live tables limit the number of games a player can play, and therefore win, limiting the money that they can make in the same period.

### **Moving**

According to the Poker Players Alliance, there are 50,000 professional poker players now looking for jobs as a result of the shutdown. Not surprisingly, some are talking about moving overseas, where online poker is legal, in order to earn their living. Since studies have shown that many online poker players are young without families of their own and can therefore move more easily, there is reason to believe that at least some players will follow through on this. The PokerStars Q&A section has even addressed this topic, advising players that their accounts will be reactivated if they can provide proof of residency outside the United States. However, players must permanently relocate in order to play. American players merely traveling outside of the United States are not permitted to play from abroad.

### **Conclusion**

After the shutdown, poker players do have other options available to play. However, none is as secure and convenient as the affected websites which had earned such trust and massive player followings. Players hope for the return of those sites even as the government pushes them toward riskier options.

*Crime in the Suites is authored by the [Ifrah Law Firm](#), a Washington DC-based law firm specializing in the defense of government investigations and litigation. Our client base spans many regulated industries, particularly e-business, e-commerce, government contracts, gaming and healthcare.*

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