

Detroit automakers look to restart N. America plants May 18

May 5 2020



In this Feb. 26, 2019 file photo, Jeep vehicles are parked outside the Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit. Major U.S. automakers are planning to reopen North American factories within two weeks, potentially putting thousands of workers back on the assembly line, as part of a gradual return to normality. Fiat Chrysler CEO Mike Manley said Tuesday, May 5, 2020, his company plans to start reopening factories May 18 depending on easing of government restrictions. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio, File)

Major U.S. automakers are planning to reopen North American factories within two weeks, potentially putting thousands of workers back on the assembly line as part of a gradual return to normality.

Fiat Chrysler CEO Mike Manley said Tuesday his company plans to start reopening factories May 18 depending on easing of government restrictions. Detroit automakers will likely be on the same timetable because their workers are represented by the same union.

The United Auto Workers union on Tuesday appeared to be onboard.

Detroit automakers employ about 150,000 factory workers in the United States alone. Auto plants have been shut since mid-March because of the outbreak. At least 25 employees at auto facilities represented by the UAW have died as a result of COVID-19, although it's not known if they were infected at work.

Manley said a lot depends on whether Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer allows factories to reopen. Michigan's shelter-at-home order remains in effect until May 15.

Last week, Whitmer hinted that [auto](#) plants may soon reopen as the curve of cases continues to flatten. She said the reopening could take place as long as the UAW can ensure [employees](#) feel safe.

Armed protesters entered the Capitol building last week and the Republican-led [state legislature](#) refused to extend the state's coronavirus emergency declaration. They also voted to authorize a lawsuit challenging Whitmer's authority and actions to combat the pandemic.

Whitmer faces pressure from the White House to relax restrictions as well.

Auto manufacturing is a major economic driver in Michigan, of course, and the state is facing a crippling cutoff in revenue with the plants closed.

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