

RULE PUNISHMENTS GO ON

BACK IN



TENSION: Protest over strict Covid rules



UNIQUE SITUATION: A deserted Grafton Street during the pandemic; (right) our man Danny with top solicitor Brian Burns



TRAVEL BUDDS: Kirstie McGrath (top) and Niamh Mulreany were known as 'Dubai Two'

High-profile Covid cases

EMERGENCY laws during the pandemic targeted travel, socialising, mask mandates and going outside limited zones.

They were first introduced under the Health (Preservation and Protection and other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) Act 2020.

Offences included breaching regulations to prevent, limit, minimise or slow the spread of Covid, restrictions on the movement of persons, and obligations on relevant travellers to self-quarantine.

They led to high-profile cases - such as Dublin mums Niamh Mulreany and Kirstie McGrath.

The pair had allegedly refused a mandatory quarantine hotel in 2021 after they returned from a cosmetic surgery trip in Dubai.

The pair became known as the "Dubai Two" and were detained for a time at Mountjoy Women's Prison.

In December 2021, Cork grandmother Margaret Buttimer was jailed for six months for refusing to wear a mask.

She had also been imprisoned for 90 days in July 2021 for the same offence.

In January 2021, three men received fines after they told gardai they had travelled from Meath to get burgers from a Dublin takeaway.

Over the border in Co Fermanagh, country music star Nathan Carter apologised after the PSNI called to his home following reports of a house party.

Cops issued a €1,160 fine to the organiser of the event and 14 fines of €200 to attendees.



INCIDENTS: Buttimer and (below) Carter



One European citizen had travelled home to get passports for her children, as her own embassy was closed. She was concerned she'd need to care for her unwell parents. Her prosecution was later struck out.

Justice Minister Helen McEntee has no

plans for an amnesty on Covid prosecutions - but has increased the number of judges to deal with them. A spokesperson said: "Earlier this year the Government committed to dramatically increase the number of judges to facilitate greater access to justice and to

clear Covid backlogs."

During Covid, gardai could issue fixed penalty notices for breaking restrictions. Fines for travel abroad hit €2,000.

Non-payment of fines resulted in summonses to the District Court.

IRELAND had one of the strictest lockdowns in the world - as such, the prosecution rate here is almost five times that of our nearest neighbours, the UK.

Even though they have 10 times our population, we have 400 Covid court cases a month,

PROSECUTION HERE FIVE TIMES THAT OF U.K.

compared to 100 there.

There were over 28,000 Covid prosecutions in England and Wales during the pandemic compared to over 13,000 in the Republic.

The convictions were for

offences such as attendance at gatherings or arriving at airports without a test.

Data for January to April this year indicate there are still over 400 cases a month being taken here. Two people

have been jailed so far in 2023.

During Covid, 72 were given jail sentences, with 26 suspended. British courts hit offenders with higher fines - an average last year of €7,000 compared to our €2,000 max.