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# Additional enforcement powers for breaches of COVID-19 regulations

From [Department of Health](#)

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The government has today agreed to introduce additional enforcement powers for An Garda Síochána to deal with breaches of COVID-19 regulations.

The new Health (Amendment) Bill 2020 will amend the Health Act 1947 to allow for a system of fixed penalty notices. It is planned to enact the legislation as soon as possible.

Members of An Garda Síochána will continue with the policing policy which has worked to keep the vast majority of the public with them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

They will continue to use the 'Four Es': engage, educate, encourage and only as a final resort - enforce.

Currently, sanctions of a fine up to €2,500 and/or six months imprisonment can apply under the 1947 Health Act. The new amendments will introduce a system of tiered fines, including fixed penalty notices which can be set up to €500.

The fixed penalty notices offences and the level of penalties to apply will be determined by regulations from the Minister for Health in consultation with the Minister for Justice. The Ministers will continue to work closely on this matter and will consult with the government before finalisation of new regulations. These amendments also provide for a system of tiered penalties where higher sanctions apply to repeat offences.

Separately, the legislation will also make it an offence to organise an event in a private home or garden, such as a house party, that is in breach of the public health regulations which apply at the time. Appropriate penalties will be put in place.

Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly TD, said:

"Although the majority of us are following the public health guidance in relation to COVID-19, and have done so since the beginning of this pandemic, some are not. The objective of these measures is to enhance compliance with public health guidance. Adhering to the public health guidance is important as not only does it help us to protect ourselves and the people around us, it also protects our health system and allows our healthcare workers to continuing caring for all patients, both those with COVID-19 and those with other healthcare needs."

Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee TD, said:

"While the vast majority of people continue to comply with the restrictions, it is clear that too many people are acting in a manner which enables the transmission of the virus and therefore additional measures are needed. The Gardai will continue policing as they have done throughout the pandemic: by encouraging people to comply with public health regulations.

"The system of penalties being proposed here may help to change behaviour. It is important to stress that the aim needs to be preventing the kind of behaviour which endangers others, rather than aiming to see a large number of fines issued for such behaviour. This shouldn't become a numbers game: the objective is to get people to behave responsibly, rather than impose punishment."