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Transgender Health Injection Guide

How to Give Yourself a Hormone Injection Intramuscular (IM)

What is an Intramuscular Injection?

An intramuscular injection, delivers medication deep into the muscle tissue. This allows the medication to be quickly absorbed into the bloodstream.

Intramuscular shots are given at a 90° angle, in other words, the needle is going straight through the skin into the muscle.

Needles for IM injections can be 22 – 23 gauge, 1" to 1.5" (inches) in length, adjusted for thickness of site.

NEVER REUSE OR SHARE SYRINGES OR NEEDLES.

STEP 1 Setting Up for the Injection

Find a comforatable, well-lit working place and inject at the same time of day each time.

- Clean your work area and assemble supplies:
  - Medication in a vial
  - Disposable syringe and two needles—one 18 G needle (to draw up medication) and one injection needle (22 – 23 G; 1" to 1.5" inch)
  - Two alcohol swabs (one for vial, one for skin)
  - Puncture-proof needle/sharps disposal container
- Check the expiration date on the medication vial. Do not use a medication with visible particles, medication that is discolored, or is expired.
- **WASH YOUR HANDS.** Hand washing is one of the most important things you can do to prevent infection.

This information was created and reviewed through a partnership with the UAMS Patient and Family Advisory Councils and the UAMS Center for Health Literacy.

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STEP 2

Preparing the Injection Dose

- Take the cap off the vial. Clean the rubber stopper with one alcohol swab, and then allow it to air dry.
- Check the package containing the syringe. If the package has been opened or damaged, do not use the syringe.
- Pull the 18 G needle cover straight off the syringe. Then, pull back the plunger and draw air into the syringe. The amount of air drawn into the syringe should be the same amount (mL or cc) as the dose of medication that your doctor prescribed.

DO NOT LET THE NEEDLE TOUCH ANY SURFACES.

- Keep the vial on your flat working surface and insert the needle straight down through the center of the rubber stopper into the bottle ***(Figure 1)***.
- Push the plunger of the syringe down and push the air from the syringe into the vial.
- Keeping the needle in the vial, turn the vial upside down.
- Position the needle so the liquid is covering the tip of the needle.
- Keeping the vial upside down, slowly pull back on the plunger to fill the syringe with the medication to the number (mL or cc) that matches the dose your doctor ordered ***(Figure 2)***.
- Keeping the needle in the vial, check for air bubbles in the syringe. If there are air bubbles, gently tap the syringe with your fingers until the air bubbles rise to the top of the syringe. Then slowly push the plunger up to force the air bubbles out of the syringe without removing the needle from the bottle ***(Figure 3)***.
- After air bubbles are gone, pull the plunger back to the number (mL or cc) marking on the syringe that matches your dose.

(Figure 1)

(Figure 2)

(Figure 3)

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- Pull the syringe with needle out of the bottle, remove the 18 G needle (discarding it into the sharps container, without recapping it), and place a new IM injection needle securely on the syringe. Remove the protective cap from the injecting needle.
- Check to make sure that you have the correct dose in the syringe. It is VERY important that you use the exact dose prescribed by your doctor ***(Figure 4)***.

(Figure 4)

STEP 3 Selecting and Preparing the Injection Site

VASTUS LATERALIS MUSCLE IN THE THIGH

The upper thigh is a good site if you are injecting yourself.

- Look at the top of your thigh, and imagine dividing it into a three by three grid.
- The injection will go into the outer middle third.

GLUTEUS MAXIMUS MUSCLE IN THE BUTTOCKS

To find the correct location for injecting into the Gluteus Maximus muscle:

- Expose the buttocks and imagine dividing each buttock into four parts.
- Aim the injection into the upper, outer quarter of the buttock towards the hip bone (approximately at the top of where a pants pocket would be).

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STEP 4

Give the Injection

- Clean the injection site skin with a new alcohol swab; let the skin air dry.
- Hold the skin around the injection site by pinching up a section of tissue about an inch wide. (The portion of skin between your fingers will be the injection site.)
- Insert the IM needle into the muscle at a 90-degree angle with one quick and firm motion.
- After inserting the needle into the muscle, lift your hand away from where it is holding the skin.
- Gently pull back on the plunger of the syringe to check for blood.
  - If you see blood in the syringe, do not inject the medicine, and remove the needle immediately. Replace the IM needle and try again at a different site.
  - If you do not see any blood in the syringe, you can complete the injection by pushing the medicine slowly into the muscle.
- You may feel some burning or pressure as the medication enters the muscle.
- After the medication has been injected, pull back on the syringe to remove the needle from your skin. Dispose of the syringe and needle properly, using a sharps container.
- Gently press an alcohol swab on the injection site. Hold pressure on the site until there is no bleeding. You can use a band aid if needed.

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Tips for Reducing Injection Pain

- Never reuse needles.
- Use separate drawing-up and injecting needles.
- Let the skin dry fully from the alcohol wipe before beginning the injection.
- Keep the muscles in the injection area warm and relaxed.
- Inject medicine that is at room temperature.
- Break through the skin quickly with the needle.
- Insert the needle straight into the skin, and pull it straight out again without changing direction or wiggling the syringe.

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Instructions for Disposing of "Sharps"

Improper disposal of syringes, needles, and other sharp objects can pose a health risk and damage the environment. You should never dispose of sharps in standard household waste.

***The Arkansas Department of Health offers these Guidelines for Safe Managment and Disposal of Household-Generated Needles and Sharps*:**

If you are a household generator of contaminated sharps and you **DO** have a community sharps collection program in your area, approved sharps containers are usually provided free of charge from the collection program. You should use these containers according the instructions provided by the collection program.

If you are a household generator of contaminated sharps and you **DO NOT** have a community sharps collection program in your area, the following guidance from Arkansas' Rules and Regulations Pertaining to Medical Waste from Generators and Health Care Related Facilities should be used for the safe disposal of household generated contaminated needles and sharps:

1. **ACCUMULATION:** Section V, C., 2. of the regulation states that "…leak proof containers should be used for disposal of all sharps, which should be chemically disinfected before disposal as regular solid waste." Thick plastic, puncture resistant containers (such as liquid soap, laundry soap or fabric softener containers) should be used to accumulate and temporarily store the sharps prior to disinfection and disposal. Any such container used for this purpose must have a cap or lid that can be tightly secured to protect against any accidental exposure. Once the container is ⅔ full it is ready for disinfection and disposal.
2. **DISINFECTION:** Section VI, F., 3., b. of the regulation states that the chemical disinfection process to be used, as approved by the Environmental Protection Agency, is soaking the contaminated needles and sharps in a solution of one part hypochlorite bleach "to no more than ten parts of water (1:10 dilution), for at least ten minutes." This 1:10 bleach solution should be introduced into the laundry soap container, covering all of the contents completely, and then allowed to sit for at least 10 minutes. After soaking, the excess liquid solution should be drained into a sink drain or a commode. The excess bleach solution must be drained prior to disposal of the container of disinfected sharps.
3. **DISPOSAL:** After chemical disinfection has been completed, the laundry soap container holding the disinfected needles and sharps must be securely closed before double bagging for disposal as regular solid waste. Do not put a red biohazard bag or container in the solid waste stream.

These instructions were adapted from the University of Michigan Guidelines available here: http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/spinal-CordInjuryProgram/IMselfInjectionTesto.pdf

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How to Give Yourself a Hormone Injection Subcutaneous (SubQ)

What is a Subcutaneous Injection?

A subcutaneous injection delivers medication into the subcutaneous layer of tissue that is directly under the skin. Medication delivered this way is more slowly absorbed into the bloodstream than medication that is directly injected into the muscle.

Needles for SubQ injections are usually 25 – 26 gauge and 5/8” (inch) in length. Medication should never be drawn up through these needles. Use a separate drawing-up needle.

NEVER REUSE OR SHARE SYRINGES OR NEEDLES.

STEP 1 Setting Up for the Injection

Find a comforatable, well-lit working place and inject at the same time of day each time.

- Clean your work area and assemble supplies:
  - Medication in a vial
  - Disposable syringe and two needles—one 18 G needle (to draw up medication) and one subcutaneous injection needle (25 – 26 G; 5/8” inch)
  - Two alcohol swabs (one for vial, one for skin)
  - Puncture-proof needle/sharps disposal container
- Check the expiration date on the medication vial. Do not use a medication with visible particles, medication that is discolored, or is expired.
- **WASH YOUR HANDS.** Hand washing is one of the most important things you can do to prevent infection.

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STEP 2

Preparing the Injection Dose

- Take the cap off the vial. Clean the rubber stopper with one alcohol swab, and then allow it to air dry.
- Check the package containing the syringe. If the package has been opened or damaged, do not use the syringe.
- Pull the 18 G needle cover straight off the syringe. Then, pull back the plunger and draw air into the syringe. The amount of air drawn into the syringe should be the same amount (mL or cc) as the dose of medication that your doctor prescribed.

DO NOT LET THE NEEDLE TOUCH ANY SURFACES.

- Keep the vial on your flat working surface and insert the needle straight down through the center of the rubber stopper into the bottle ***(Figure 1)***.
- Push the plunger of the syringe down and push the air from the syringe into the vial.
- Keeping the needle in the vial, turn the vial upside down.
- Position the needle so the liquid is covering the tip of the needle.
- Keeping the vial upside down, slowly pull back on the plunger to fill the syringe with the medication to the number (mL or cc) that matches the dose your doctor ordered ***(Figure 2)***.
- Keeping the needle in the vial, check for air bubbles in the syringe. If there are air bubbles, gently tap the syringe with your fingers until the air bubbles rise to the top of the syringe. Then slowly push the plunger up to force the air bubbles out of the syringe without removing the needle from the bottle ***(Figure 3)***.
- After air bubbles are gone, pull the plunger back to the number (mL or cc) marking on the syringe that matches your dose.

(Figure 1)

(Figure 2)

(Figure 3)

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- Pull the syringe with needle out of the bottle, remove the 18 G needle (discarding it into the sharps container, without recapping it), and place the smaller subcutaneous injection needle securely on the syringe. Remove the protective cap from the injecting needle.
- Check to make sure that you have the correct dose in the syringe. It is VERY important that you use the exact dose prescribed by your doctor ***(Figure 4)***.

(Figure 4)

STEP 3 Selecting and Preparing the Injection Site

There are several places you can give yourself a subcutaneous injection, including the sides or backs of your arms, the fronts of your thighs, or your abdomen. You may also use the buttocks as described above.

If you choose to inject yourself in the abdomen, avoid the belly button or any bony areas.

Wherever you choose to inject, you should be able to firmly grasp the skin and pinch it up into approximately a 1-inch fold.

Injection site on the side of the arm

Injection site on the abdomen

Injection site on the back of the arms

Injection site on the thighs

Source: NIH Medical Arts

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STEP 4 Give the Injection

- Make certain your hands are clean.
- Clean the injection site skin with an alcohol swab; let the skin air dry.
- Hold the prepared syringe with the hand you will use to give the injection.
- With the other hand, pinch a fold of skin. (You will inject into the skin between your fingers.)
- With one quick and firm motion, insert the needle either directly into the skin fold at a 90-degree angle, or angle it slightly (45 degrees), if that is easier.
- After inserting the needle under the skin, lift your hand away that is holding the skin.
- Gently pull back on the plunger of the syringe to check for blood.

  - If you see blood in the syringe, do not inject the medicine, and remove the needle immediately. Replace the SubQ needle and try again at a different site.
  - If you do not see any blood in the syringe, you can complete the injection by pushing the medicine slowly under your skin.
- Wait 5 seconds, and then pull back on the syringe to remove the needle from your skin. Dispose of the syringe and needle properly, using a sharps container.
- Gently press an alcohol swab on the injection site. Hold pressure on the site until there is no bleeding. You can use a band aid if needed.

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Tips for Reducing Injection Pain

- Never reuse needles.
- Use separate drawing-up and injecting needles.
- Let the skin dry fully from the alcohol wipe before beginning the injection.
- Keep the muscles in the injection area warm and relaxed.
- Inject medicine that is at room temperature.
- Break through the skin quickly with the needle.
- Insert the needle straight into the skin, and pull it straight out again without changing direction.

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2. **DISINFECTION:** Section VI, F., 3., b. of the regulation states that the chemical disinfection process to be used, as approved by the Environmental Protection Agency, is soaking the contaminated needles and sharps in a solution of one part hypochlorite bleach "to no more than ten parts of water (1:10 dilution), for at least ten minutes." This 1:10 bleach solution should be introduced into the laundry soap container, covering all of the contents completely, and then allowed to sit for at least 10 minutes. After soaking, the excess liquid solution should be drained into a sink drain or a commode. The excess bleach solution must be drained prior to disposal of the container of disinfected sharps.
3. **DISPOSAL:** After chemical disinfection has been completed, the laundry soap container holding the disinfected needles and sharps must be securely closed before double bagging for disposal as regular solid waste. Do not put a red biohazard bag or container in the solid waste stream.

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