

Z-Track Method

● SKILL SNAPSHOT

Purpose

- Displaces skin before an IM injection so the needle track seals, reducing medication leakage and tissue irritation.

When to use

- Ordered/appropriate for irritating, staining, or deep IM medications when manufacturer and policy support Z-track.

Supplies needed

- MAR/order; medication; correct syringe/needle; antiseptic; gauze; gloves; sharps container.

● PREP + PATIENT SETUP

- Verify medication rights, volume, site, needle length, and whether Z-track is recommended.
- Select adequate ventrogluteal or other approved muscle; assess landmarks/skin.
- Explain technique and position muscle relaxed.

● VAULT TIP

- Pull, hold, inject, wait, withdraw—then release. The order creates the seal.

● STEP-BY-STEP

1. Hand hygiene; identify patient; verify dose and prepare medication aseptically. Change needle after drawing up if indicated.
2. Landmark the selected IM site and ensure volume is safe for muscle and patient.
3. Apply gloves. Clean skin with approved antiseptic and allow it to dry.
4. With nondominant hand, pull skin and subcutaneous tissue laterally/downward about 2.5-3.5 cm and hold displaced.
5. Hold syringe like a dart and insert needle quickly at 90 degrees into muscle.
6. Stabilize syringe. Follow medication/policy guidance about aspiration; do not aspirate for vaccines.
7. Inject medication slowly and steadily, generally about 1 mL per 10 seconds unless drug guidance differs.
8. Keep skin displaced and wait about 10 seconds after medication is injected.
9. Withdraw needle smoothly at the same 90-degree angle.
10. Release displaced skin only after needle is out, sealing the track.
11. Apply gentle pressure with gauze. Do not massage an irritating/staining medication site.
12. Activate safety device and discard intact in sharps. Reassess pain, bleeding, reaction, and medication response.

● SAFETY REMINDERS

- Correct needle length is needed to reach muscle.
- Do not use a site with infection, edema, bruising, scar, or poor perfusion.
- Maximum volume is site/patient/medication specific.
- Have emergency support for anaphylaxis-risk drugs.

● COMMON MISTAKES

- Releasing skin before withdrawal.
- Massaging afterward.
- Wrong site/needle length.
- Injecting too quickly.

● DOCUMENTATION

- Medication, dose, route, time.
- Exact site/side and Z-track use.
- Assessment/tolerance.
- Response/adverse effects.
- Teaching and notifications.