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Citation for published version:

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):
10.1103/PhysRevLett.99.262302

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:
Physical Review Letters
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hadronic matter to a deconfined quark-gluon plasma [12]. While their proton-induced Au-Au collisions. While their proton-induced catalysis of the

density can be achieved by experiments using heavy-ion reactions, the results are integrated over a wide

range of temperature and density, many channels contribute, and the reactions proceed far from equilibrium. This

makes an exact interpretation of results difficult, and the connection between chiral symmetry restoration and in-
medium modifications remains unclear [19–21]. However, the in-medium effects for the vector mesons at normal

nuclear density and zero temperature are predicted to be so large that they can be studied by fixed-target experi-
ments involving elementary reactions [22].

Brown et al. [8] start from an effective Lagrangian at low energy and zero density. They apply the same

Lagrangian at nuclear density but with masses and cou-
pling constants that are modified according to the symmetry constraints of QCD (e.g., chiral symmetry). This model predicts an in-medium scaling law that results in a decrease in the mass of vector mesons by 20%.

Hatsuda et al. [9], based on QCD sum rule calculations, obtain mass changes of the vector mesons in the nuclear medium. Their calculations result in a linear decrease of the masses as a function of density introducing a mass shift parameter \( \alpha \):

\[
\frac{m_{VM}(\rho)}{m_{VM}(\rho = 0)} = 1 - \alpha \frac{\rho}{\rho_0}, \quad \alpha = 0.16 \pm 0.06, \tag{1}
\]

where \( m_{VM} \) is the mass of the vector meson, \( \rho_0 \) indicates nominal nuclear density (0.16 fm\(^{-3}\)), and \( \rho = 0 \) indicates the vacuum.

Models based on nuclear many-body effects predict a broadening in the width of the \( \rho \) meson with increasing density. This prediction is based on the assumption that many-body excitations may be present with the same quantum numbers and can be mixed with the hadronic states [10,11,23–26]. Furthermore, due to the uncertainty of the coupling constants as a function of density, the branching ratios are expected to change in the nuclear medium. Their calculations result in a linear decrease of the \( \rho \) meson with increasing density introducing a mass shift parameter \( \alpha \).

An observation of a medium-modified vector meson invariant mass decrease (\( \alpha = 0.09 \pm 0.002 \)) has been claimed by a KEK-PS Collaboration in an experiment where 12 GeV protons were incident on nuclear targets, and the \( e^+e^- \) pairs were detected [28–30]. Very recently, the CBELSA-TAPS Collaboration has reported a 14% downward shift in the mass of the \( \omega \) meson, where the analysis focused on the \( \pi^0\gamma \) decay of low-momentum \( \omega \) mesons photoproduced on a nuclear target [31].

The data for the present study were taken in 2002 using the CEBAF accelerator [32] and the CLAS detector located in Hall B of Jefferson Laboratory [33]. The incident bremsstrahlung photon beam on the target was produced from a primary electron beam of 3–4 GeV in energy.

The Čerenkov counters (CC) in combination with the electromagnetic calorimeters (EC) were the two most crucial CLAS components for this experiment. The EC and CC cover the forward part of the CLAS detector, subtending scattering angles of \( 8^\circ < \theta < 45^\circ \). The \( e^+e^- \) event selection and the rejection of the very large \( \pi^+\pi^- \) background were done through cuts on the EC and the CC. The pion rejection (or misidentification) factor is determined to be of the order of \( 10^{-7} \) for a two-track measurement [34].

The target contained a liquid-deuterium cell and six solid foils, each with a 1.2 cm diameter. Four of the foils were carbon, one was titanium, and one iron. The total thickness of the deuterium and the four carbon targets was each 1 g/cm\(^2\), while the titanium and iron targets were each \( \frac{1}{3} \) g/cm\(^2\). The atomic weights of iron and titanium were close enough that the data from these two targets were combined to increase the statistics. The separation between targets was 2.5 cm, the target nucleus was determined by the reconstructed position of the production vertex, and the CLAS vertex reconstruction resolution was 0.3 cm.

The object of this study is the invariant mass of \( e^+e^- \) from the decay of the vector mesons \( \rho, \omega, \) and \( \phi \). This branching ratio for vector mesons into \( e^+e^- \) is of the order of \( 10^{-4} \). Other physical processes also contribute to the background, for example, \( \omega \rightarrow \pi^0 e^+e^- \), \( \eta \rightarrow \gamma e^+e^- \), and \( \pi^0 \rightarrow \gamma e^+e^- \) (Dalitz decay). In the case of the \( \eta \) and \( \pi^0 \), the \( e^+e^- \) mass is below the region of interest. In the case of the \( \omega \), the Dalitz decay is also included in the expected spectrum, with this mode tied to the \( e^+e^- \) mode. The background from \( \gamma A \rightarrow \pi^0\pi^0X \) with both pions decaying via the Dalitz mode is also considered. In this case, the \( e^+e^- \) may be detected from one pion and the \( e^- \) detected from the other. This process was simulated with the known \( \pi^0\pi^0 \) cross section [35] and angular distributions, and its contribution determined to be small (0.02%). In addition, Bethe-Heitler \( e^+e^- \) pairs have been simulated with the expected cross section and mass distribution, and also found to be negligible (<0.01%).

Lepton pair production also has a background of random combinations of \( e^+e^- \) pairs due to uncorrelated sources occurring within the same 2 ns CEBAF beam bucket. The most salient feature of the uncorrelated sources is that they produce the same-charge lepton pairs as well as oppositely charged pairs. The same-charge pairs \( (e^+e^+ \text{ or } e^-e^-) \) provide a natural normalization of the uncorrelated background.

The combinatorial background is determined by an event-mixing technique [20,36,37]. The electron of a given event is combined with positron of another event, as the two samples of electrons and positrons are completely uncorrelated. This produces the phase-space distribution where electrons and positrons are actually from different processes but lying in the same event.

The mixed opposite-charge leptons chosen from samples of uncorrelated events were used to estimate the shape of the combinatorial background. This distribution was then normalized to the number of expected opposite-charge pairs. The result is shown in Fig. 1 for the individual targets.

To simulate each physics process, a realistic model was employed and corrected for the CLAS acceptance. The events were generated using a code based on the semiclassical Boltzmann-Uehling-Uhlenbeck (BUU) transport model developed by the Giessen group that treats photon-nucleus reactions as a two-step process [38]. In the first step, the incoming photons react with a single nucleon, taking into account various nuclear effects, e.g., shadowing, Fermi motion, collisional broadening, Pauli blocking, and nuclear binding. Then in the second step, the produced particles are propagated explicitly through the nucleus allowing for...
final-state interactions, governed by the semiclassical BUU transport equations. A complete treatment of the $e^+e^-$ pair production from $\gamma A$ reactions at Jefferson Lab energies using this code can be found in Ref. [39].

The expected combinatorial background distributions are subtracted from the $e^+e^-$ effective mass distributions. The peaks of the $\omega$ and $\phi$ vector mesons are prominent in the invariant mass spectra, and one can determine the normalization of these narrow peaks rather easily. The $\omega$ and $\phi$ vector mesons have long lifetimes ($c\tau = 23.4$ and 44.4 fm, respectively) and momenta $>0.8$ GeV, therefore, low probabilities of decaying inside the target nucleus. The shape of these peaks and the $\omega$ Dalitz channel are well described by the BUU model where the ratio of $\omega$ to $\omega$ Dalitz decay was also fixed to their branching ratios. These distributions were fit to the data, then the resulting normalized heights were subtracted, leaving just the experimental spectra of the $\rho$ mass. These fits for carbon and for iron-titanium are shown in Fig. 2.

The extracted $\rho$ mass distributions are then fit with the exact spectral functional form obtained from calculating the cross section of production of the $\rho$ meson including the leptonic decay width [39–41]. The results of the fits superimposed on the data are shown in Fig. 3, and the results are tabulated in Table I. The fits describe the data very well, and while the width of the $\rho$ meson is consistent with the natural width of 150 MeV and collisional broadening [43]—that is also included in the BUU calculations—it is not compatible with the doubling of the $\rho$ width reported by NA60 [16].

A good approximation for the $\rho$ spectral function used to fit the data is a Breit-Wigner function divided by $\mu^3$, where $\mu$ is the mass of the $e^+e^-$ pair [39]. Indeed the fits to the Breit-Wigner function divided by $\mu^3$ rather than a simple Breit-Wigner function describe the data very well (Fig. 4). (We note that the spectral functions themselves are of a symmetric Breit-Wigner shape without the asymmetric broadening towards lower masses observed in the results of the heavy-ion experiments.) The sensitivity of the fits to the $1/\mu^3$ factor indicates that the systematic uncertainties in the background subtraction are insignificant, and the $\rho$
spectra are cleanly extracted. Similar results are obtained for the heavier targets, C and Fe-Ti, where the uncorrelated background is proportionally larger.

Based on the notation of Ref. [9] and Eq. (1), and using a ratio method [34], we obtain the shift parameter $\alpha = 0.02 \pm 0.02$ for the Fe-Ti target (effective density of $\rho \approx 0.5\rho_0$) with $\rho$ momenta ranging from 0.8 to 3.0 GeV. This is consistent with no significant shift of the spectral functions obtained from the exact calculations given in Refs. [39–41] with no modification beyond standard nuclear many-body effects. The momentum dependence of the in-medium modifications can also be studied with future higher statistics experiments. The theoretical interpretation of the first moment of the $\rho$ spectral functions may also shed light on the relation between the chiral symmetry restoration and mass spectra observed in the experimental data [47].

![Figure 3](image-url)  
**FIG. 3** (color online). The result of a simultaneous fit (solid lines) to the $\rho$ mass spectra and the ratios for $^2$H (top), C (middle), and Fe-Ti (bottom).

![Figure 4](image-url)  
**FIG. 4**. Fits to the $\rho$ mass distribution from $^2$H data using a Breit-Wigner function (dashed line) and a Breit-Wigner function divided by $\mu^3$ (solid line).

The total systematic uncertainty for the measured $\alpha$ due to various sources is estimated to be $\Delta \alpha = \pm 0.01$ [34]. Our result sets an upper limit of $\alpha = 0.053$ with a 95% confidence level. This does not favor the prediction of Refs. [8,9] for a 20% mass shift and $\alpha = 0.16 \pm 0.06$, respectively, and is significantly different from other similar experiments [28–30], where $\alpha = 0.092 \pm 0.002$, with no broadening in the width of the $\rho$ meson. Our results on the $\rho$ vector meson are also not necessarily inconsistent with the result of the experiment in Ref. [31] that measures a $-14\%$ shift in the mass of the $\omega$ meson, since different medium modification mechanisms are indeed expected for $\rho$ and $\omega$ mesons [45,46].

The extracted experimental $\rho$ mass spectrum with the unique characteristic of electromagnetic interactions in both the production and decay is well described by the $\rho$ functional form obtained from the exact calculations given in Refs. [39–41] with no modification beyond standard nuclear many-body effects. The momentum dependence of the in-medium modifications can also be studied with future higher statistics experiments. The theoretical interpretation of the first moment of the $\rho$ spectral functions may also shed light on the relation between the chiral symmetry restoration and mass spectra observed in the experimental data [47].

**TABLE I.** The mass and width (in MeV) of the $\rho$ meson obtained from the simultaneous fits to the mass spectra for each target and the ratio to $^2$H compared to the result of the BUU simulations. The masses are consistent with the Particle Data Group values [42] ($770.0 \pm 0.8$ MeV) and the widths are consistent with the natural width ($150.7 \pm 1.1$ MeV) modified for collisional broadening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Mass CLAS data</th>
<th>Width CLAS data</th>
<th>Mass BUU</th>
<th>Width BUU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$^2$H</td>
<td>770.3 $\pm$ 3.2</td>
<td>185.2 $\pm$ 8.6</td>
<td>774.5 $\pm$ 4.9</td>
<td>160.1 $\pm$ 10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>762.5 $\pm$ 3.7</td>
<td>176.4 $\pm$ 9.5</td>
<td>773.8 $\pm$ 0.9</td>
<td>177.6 $\pm$ 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe-Ti</td>
<td>779.0 $\pm$ 5.7</td>
<td>217.7 $\pm$ 14.5</td>
<td>773.8 $\pm$ 5.4</td>
<td>202.5 $\pm$ 11.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We would like to thank the staff of the Accelerator and Physics Divisions at Jefferson Laboratory who made this experiment possible. This work was supported in part by the U.S. Department of Energy and National Science Foundation, the Research Corporation, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the Italian Instituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare, the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and Commissariat à l’Energie Atomique, the Korea Research Foundation, and the U.K. Engineering and Physical Science Research Council. Jefferson Science Associates (JSA) operates the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility for the United States Department of Energy under Contract No. DE-AC05-06OR23177.

[34] M. H. Wood et al. (CLAS Collaboration), “Light Vector Mesons in the Nuclear Medium” (to be published).