New Measurements of High-Momentum Nucleons and Short-Range Structures in Nuclei

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New Measurements of High-Momentum Nucleons and Short-Range Structures in Nuclei


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We present new measurements of electron scattering from high-momentum nucleons in nuclei. These data allow an improved determination of the strength of two-nucleon correlations for several nuclei, including light nuclei where clustering effects can, for the first time, be examined. The data also include the kinematic region where three-nucleon correlations are expected to dominate.

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A complete understanding of the complex structure of nuclei is one of the major goals of nuclear physics. Significant progress has been made over the past decade, yielding ab initio techniques for calculating the structure of light nuclei based on the nucleon-nucleon (and three-nucleon) interactions [1,2], along with methods that extend to heavier nuclei. One of the least understood aspects of nuclei is their short-range structure, where nucleons are close together and interact via the poorly constrained repulsive core of the N-N interaction, yielding high-momentum nucleons. Measurements of scattering from these high-momentum nucleons provides direct access to the short-range structure of nuclei [3–5].

This regime can be accessed through inclusive quasi-elastic (QE) scattering in which a virtual photon of energy $\nu$ and momentum $\hat{q}$ is absorbed on a nucleon. Elastic scattering from a nucleon at rest is kinematically well defined and corresponds to $x = Q^2/2M_N\nu = 1$, where $M_N$ is the nucleon mass and $Q^2 = q^2 - \nu^2$. For QE scattering from a nucleon moving in the nucleus, the cross section is peaked around $x = 1$ and has a width characterized by the Fermi momentum ($k_F$) with tails that extend to higher momenta. Inclusive scattering at high $Q^2$ minimizes final-state interactions while low energy transfer suppresses inelastic contributions. Thus, inclusive scattering at large $Q^2$ and low $\nu$, corresponding to $x > 1$, provides relatively clean isolation of...
scattering from high-momentum nucleons. We present new measurements in this kinematic region for a range of light and heavy nuclei which expose the high-momentum, short-distance structure in nuclei.

Experiment E02-019 was performed in Hall C at Jefferson Lab (JLab). A continuous wave electron beam of 5.766 GeV at currents of up to 80 µA impinged on targets of $^2$H, $^3$He, $^4$He, Be, C, Cu, and Au. Scattered electrons were detected using the High Momentum Spectrometer (HMS) for electron scattering angles $\theta_e = 18^\circ$, 22$^\circ$, 26$^\circ$, 32$^\circ$, 40$^\circ$, and 50$^\circ$. A detailed description of the measurement and the analysis is available in Refs. [6,7].

Most of the significant uncertainties are discussed in Ref. [6], but for the very large $x$ data used in this analysis, some corrections become more significant. For the cryogenic targets, contributions from scattering in the aluminum endcaps of the target can be large, up to $\sim 50\%$ for the $^3$He target. This is subtracted using measurements from an aluminum “dummy” target, after corrections are made for the difference in radiation lengths between the real and dummy targets. A systematic uncertainty equal to 3% of the subtraction is included to account for uncertainties in the knowledge of the relative thickness of the targets. The cross sections were also corrected for Coulomb effects (up to 10% for gold) using the effective momentum approximation (EMA) calculation of Ref. [8]. We apply a conservative 20% systematic uncertainty to this correction to account for uncertainty in the EMA. The uncertainty due to possible offsets in the beam energy or spectrometer kinematics is $\leq 5\%$ in the cross sections for $x < 2$, but $\leq 2\%$ in the target ratios.

Inclusive cross sections at $x > 1$ are often analyzed using $y$-scaling [4,5,9,10]. For high-$Q^2$ quasielastic scattering with no final-state interactions (FSIs), the inclusive cross section reduces to a product of the electron-nucleon elastic cross sections, $\sigma_{eN}$, and a scaling function, $F(y, Q^2)$. We determine $y$ from energy conservation:

$$v + M_A - \epsilon_s = [M_N^2 + (q + y)^2]^{1/2} + (M_{A-1}^2 + y^2)^{1/2},$$

(1)

where $M_A$ and $M_{A-1}$ are the masses of the target and spectator $(A - 1)$ nuclei and $\epsilon_s$ is the minimum separation energy. This corresponds to the minimum initial momentum of the struck nucleon. The scaling function $F(y, Q^2)$ is extracted from the cross section,

$$F(y, Q^2) = \frac{d^2\sigma}{d\Omega dv} [Z\sigma_p + N\sigma_n]^{-1} \frac{q}{[M_N^2 + (y + q)^2]^{1/2}}.$$

(2)

and it has been shown that $F(y, Q^2)$ depends only on $y$ at large $Q^2$ values for a wide range of nuclei and momenta [10,11].

Further, if the assumption of scattering with an unexcited ($A - 1$) spectator is correct, then $F(y)$ is related to the nucleon momentum distribution, $n(k)$: $\frac{dF(y)}{dk} = -2\pi kn(k)$.

Figure 1 shows the momentum distribution determined from the new E02-019 data on the deuteron where we have taken $\sigma_p$ and $\sigma_n$ to be the off-shell (cc1) cross sections as developed in Ref. [12] using parameterizations of the neutron [13] and proton [14] form factors. Because the inelastic contribution can become significant for small $k$ and large $Q^2$, we exclude the two largest $Q^2$ settings and limit the remaining data to regions where the estimated inelastic contribution $\approx 5\%$. We find that the extracted momentum distribution is $Q^2$ independent, although our direct limits on the $Q^2$ dependence are roughly 20–30% for $k \leq 300$ MeV/c, increasing to $\sim 40\%$ at 400 MeV/c and $\sim 80\%$ at 600 MeV/c. The limits on the $Q^2$ dependence at our higher $Q^2$ values, as well as the agreement with calculations up to $k = 600$ MeV/c, support the idea that the FSI contributions are much smaller than at low $Q^2$ values, where they can increase the PWIA cross section by a factor of 2–3 or more [11,15–17]. The excess in the extracted momentum distribution at $k = 0.3$ GeV/c is present in several previous extractions from both inclusive and $D(e, e'p)$ measurements [4,18].

While the $y$-scaling criteria appear to be satisfied for the deuteron, the assumption of an unexcited spectator in Eq. (1) breaks down for heavier nuclei. In the deuteron, the spectator is a single nucleon while for heavier nuclei, the final state can involve breakup or excitations of the spectator $(A - 1)$ system, especially in the case of scattering from a preexisting SRC which should yield a high-momentum spectator in the final state. There have been many attempts to correct for this effect via a modification of the scaling variable [5,19–24] or by calculation of an explicit correction to the scaling function using a spectral function to account for the excitation of the residual system [24,25] which provide improved but model-dependent
ex extractions of $n(k)$. We can avoid this model dependence by making comparisons between nuclei in a region where the kinematics limit the scattering to $k > k_F$ [5,26]. If these high-momentum components are related to two-nucleon short-range correlations (2N-SRCs), where two nucleons have a large relative momentum but a small total momentum due to their hard two-body interaction, then they should yield the same high-momentum tail whether in a heavy nucleus or a deuteron.

The first detailed study of SRCs combined data interpolated to fixed kinematics from different experiments at SLAC [26]. A plateau was seen in the ratio $(\sigma_A/\sigma_D)$ that was roughly $A$ independent for $A \geq 12$, but smaller for $^3$He and $^4$He. Measurements from Hall B at JLab showed similar plateaus [27,28] in $A/^3$He ratios for $Q^2 \geq 1.4$ GeV$^2$. A previous JLab Hall C experiment at 4 GeV [11,29] measured scattering from nuclei and deuterium at larger $Q^2$ values than SLAC or CLAS, but had limited statistics for deuterium. While these measurements provided significant evidence for the presence of SRCs, precise $A/D$ ratios for several nuclei, covering the desired range in $x$ and $Q^2$, are limited.

Figure 2 shows the cross section ratios from E02-019 for the $\theta_e = 18^\circ$ data. For $x > 1.5$, the data show the expected plateau, although the point at $x = 1.95$ is always high because one is approaching the kinematic threshold for scattering from the deuteron at $x = M_D/M_p = 2$. This rise was not observed in previous measurements; the SLAC data did not have sufficient statistics to see the rise, while the CLAS measurements took ratios of heavy nuclei to $^3$He, where the cross section does not go to zero for $x \rightarrow 2$. Table I gives the ratio in the plateau region for a range of nuclei at all $Q^2$ values where there were sufficient large-$x$ data. We apply a cut in $x$ to isolate the plateau region, although the onset of scaling in $x$ varies somewhat with $Q^2$. The start of the plateau is independent of $Q^2$ when taken as a function of $\alpha_{2n}$.

\[ \alpha_{2n} = 2 - \frac{\nu - q + 2M_N}{2M_N}(1 + \sqrt{1 - M_N^2/W_{2n}^2}), \]

(W$_{2n}^2 = 4M_N^2 + 4M_N\nu - Q^2$) which corresponds to the light-cone momentum fraction of the struck nucleon assuming that the photon is absorbed by a single nucleon in the initial-state SRC [3,5,26,31–33]. This affects the light-cone momentum fraction of the struck nucleon and predicts an inelastic contribution of 1%–3% at $Q^2$ values where there were sufficient data. While at least one calculation suggests that the FSI is $A$ dependent [30], most indicate that the FSI contributions which do not decrease rapidly with $Q^2$ are limited to FSI between the nucleons in the initial-state SRC [3,5,26,31–33]. In this case, the FSI corrections are identical for 2N-SRCs in the deuteron or heavy nuclei, and cancel when taking the ratios. Our $y$-scaling analysis of the deuteron cross sections (Fig. 1) suggests that the FSI are relatively small for the deuteron, and the ratios shown in Table I have only a small $Q^2$ dependence, consistent with the estimated inelastic contributions, supporting the standard assumption that any FSIs in the plateau region largely cancel in taking the target ratios.

In the absence of large FSI effects, the cross section ratio $\sigma_A/\sigma_D$ yields the strength of the high-momentum tail of the momentum distribution in nucleus $A$ relative to a deuteron. If the high-momentum contribution comes

![FIG. 2. Per nucleon cross section ratios vs $x$ at $\theta_e = 18^\circ$.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$A$</th>
<th>$\theta_e = 18^\circ$</th>
<th>$\theta_e = 22^\circ$</th>
<th>$\theta_e = 26^\circ$</th>
<th>Incl. sub.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$^3$He</td>
<td>$2.14 \pm 0.04$</td>
<td>$2.28 \pm 0.06$</td>
<td>$2.33 \pm 0.10$</td>
<td>$2.13 \pm 0.04$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^4$He</td>
<td>$3.66 \pm 0.07$</td>
<td>$3.94 \pm 0.09$</td>
<td>$3.89 \pm 0.13$</td>
<td>$3.60 \pm 0.10$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be</td>
<td>$4.00 \pm 0.08$</td>
<td>$4.21 \pm 0.09$</td>
<td>$4.28 \pm 0.14$</td>
<td>$3.91 \pm 0.12$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>$4.88 \pm 0.10$</td>
<td>$5.28 \pm 0.12$</td>
<td>$5.14 \pm 0.17$</td>
<td>$4.75 \pm 0.16$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cu</td>
<td>$5.37 \pm 0.11$</td>
<td>$5.79 \pm 0.13$</td>
<td>$5.71 \pm 0.19$</td>
<td>$5.21 \pm 0.20$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au</td>
<td>$5.34 \pm 0.11$</td>
<td>$5.70 \pm 0.14$</td>
<td>$5.76 \pm 0.20$</td>
<td>$5.16 \pm 0.22$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Q^2$</td>
<td>2.7 GeV$^2$</td>
<td>3.8 GeV$^2$</td>
<td>4.8 GeV$^2$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x_{min}$</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
entirely from quasielastic scattering from a nucleon in an
$n$-$p$ SRC at rest, then this ratio represents the contribution
of $2N$-SRCs to the nuclear wave function, relative to the
deuteron, $R_{2N}(A, D)$. However, the distribution of the high-
momentum nucleons in the SRC will be modified by the
motion of the pair in the nucleus. We use the convolution
calculation and realistic parameterizations for the c.m.
motion and for SRC distributions from Ref. [33] to
calculate this smearing and find that it generates an enhance-
ment of the high-momentum tail of approximately 20% for
Iron and roughly scales with the size of the total pair
momentum. To obtain $R_{2N}(A, D)$, we use the inelastic-
subtracted cross section ratios and remove the smearing
effect of the center-of-mass (c.m.) motion of the 2N-SRC
pairs. The 20% correction for iron is scaled to the other
nuclei based on the $A$ dependence of the pair motion.
To first order, the c.m. motion “smears out” the high-
momentum tail (which falls off roughly exponentially),
producing an overall enhancement of the ratio in the pla-
tau region. In a complete calculation, the correction can
also have some small $x$ dependence in this region which
can potentially distort the shape of the ratio. However, both
the data and recent calculations [19,34,35] suggest that any
$x$ dependence of the ratio in this region is relatively small.
When removing the effect of the c.m. motion, we apply an
uncertainty equal to 30% of the calculated correction (50% for
$^3\text{He}$) to account for the overall uncertainty in calculat-
ing the smearing effect, the uncertainty in our assumed $A$
dependence of the effect, and the impact of the neglected $x$
dependence on the extracted ratio.

After correcting the measured ratios for the enhance-
ment due to motion of the pair, we obtain $R_{2N}$, given in
Table II, which represents the relative likelihood of a
nucleon in nucleus $A$ to be in a high relative momentum
pair compared to a nucleon in the deuteron. It also
provides updated results from previous experiments after
applying c.m. motion corrections and removing the $\sim 15%$
“isoscalar” correction applied in the previous works. This
correction was based on the assumption that the high-
momentum tails would have greater neutron contributions
for $N > Z$ nuclei, but the dominance of isosinglet pairs
[2,36] implies that the tail will have equal proton and
neutron contributions. The CLAS ratios are somewhat
low compared to the other extractions, which could be a
result of the lower $\alpha_{\text{min}}$ values. If $\alpha_{2n}$ is not high enough to
fully isolate $2N$-SRCs, one expects the extracted ratio will
be somewhat smaller. Note that the previous data do not
include corrections or uncertainties associated with inelas-
tic contributions or Coulomb distortion, which is estimated
to be up to 6% for the CLAS iron data and similar for the
lower $Q^2$ SLAC data.

Previous extractions of the strength of $2N$-SRCs found a
slow increase of $R_{2N}$ with $A$ in light nuclei, with little
apparent $A$ dependence for $A \geq 12$. The additional correc-
tions applied in our extraction of $2N$-SRC contributions
do not modify these basic conclusions, but these corrections,
along with the improved precision in our extraction, fur-
nishes a more detailed picture of the $A$ dependence. In a
mean-field model, one would expect the frequency for two
nucleons to be close enough together to form an $2N$-SRC
to be proportional to the average density of the nucleus [3].
However, while the density of $^9\text{Be}$ is similar to $^{3}\text{He}$, yet its value of $R_{2N}$ is much closer to that of the denser nuclei $^4\text{He}$
and $^{12}\text{C}$, demonstrating that the SRC contributions do not
simply scale with density. This is very much like the
recently observed $A$ dependence of the EMC effect [37],
where $^9\text{Be}$ was found to behave like a denser nucleus due to
its significant cluster structure. It seems natural that cluster
structure would be important in the short-range structure
and contribution of SRCs in nuclei, but this is the first such
experimental observation.

For $A/^3\text{He}$ ratios above $x = 2$, one expects the $2N$-SRC
contributions to become small enough that $3N$-SRCs may
eventually dominate. $2N$-SRCs are isolated by choosing $x$
and $Q^2$ such that the minimum initial momentum of the
struck nucleon is larger than $k_F$ [26], but it is not clear what
kinematics are required to sufficiently suppress $2N$-SRC
contributions [5], and larger $Q^2$ values may be required to
isolate $3N$-SRCs. Figure 3 shows the $^4\text{He}/^3\text{He}$ ratio at
$\theta_c = 18^\circ$, along with the CLAS ratios [28] (leaving out
their isoscalar correction). The ratios in the $2N$-SRC region
are in good agreement. Even with the large uncertainties, it
is clear that our ratio at $x > 2.25$ is significantly higher than
in the CLAS measurement. On the other hand, a similar
analysis using preliminary results from SLAC (Fig. 8.3 from
Ref. [31]) found a $^4\text{He}/^3\text{He}$ cross section ratio that
is independent of $Q^2$ between 1.0 and 2.4 GeV$^2$ and falls in
between our result and the CLAS data. A recently com-
pleted experiment [38] will map out the $x$ and $Q^2$ de-
pendence in the $3N$-SRC region with high precision.

In summary, we have presented new, high-$Q^2$ measure-
ments of inclusive scattering from nuclei at $x > 1$. We

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$A$</th>
<th>$R_{2N}$ (E02-019)</th>
<th>SLAC</th>
<th>CLAS</th>
<th>$F_{CM}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$^3\text{He}$</td>
<td>1.93 ± 0.10</td>
<td>1.8 ± 0.3</td>
<td>···</td>
<td>1.10 ± 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^4\text{He}$</td>
<td>3.02 ± 0.17</td>
<td>2.8 ± 0.4</td>
<td>2.80 ± 0.28</td>
<td>1.19 ± 0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^\text{Be}$</td>
<td>3.37 ± 0.17</td>
<td>···</td>
<td>···</td>
<td>1.16 ± 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^\text{C}$</td>
<td>4.00 ± 0.24</td>
<td>4.2 ± 0.5</td>
<td>3.50 ± 0.35</td>
<td>1.19 ± 0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^\text{Cu(Fe)}$</td>
<td>4.33 ± 0.28</td>
<td>(4.3 ± 0.8)</td>
<td>(3.90 ± 0.37)</td>
<td>1.20 ± 0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$^\text{Au}$</td>
<td>4.26 ± 0.29</td>
<td>4.0 ± 0.6</td>
<td>···</td>
<td>1.21 ± 0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Q^2$</td>
<td>$\sim$2.7 GeV$^2$</td>
<td>$\sim$1.2 GeV$^2$</td>
<td>$\sim$2 GeV$^2$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x_{\text{min}}$</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>···</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\alpha_{\text{min}}$</td>
<td>1.275</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.22–1.26</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
examine the high-momentum tail of the deuteron momentum distribution and used target ratios at \( x > 1 \) to examine the \( A \) and \( Q^2 \) dependence of the contribution of 2N-SRCs. The SRC contributions are extracted with improved statistical and systematic uncertainties and with new corrections that account for isoscalar dominance and the motion of the pair in the nucleus. The \(^9\text{Be}\) data show a significant deviation from predictions that the 2N-SRC contribution should scale with density, presumably due to strong clustering effects. At \( x > 2 \), where 3N-SRCs are expected to dominate, our \( A/\text{He} \) ratios are significantly higher than the CLAS data and suggest that contributions from 3N-SRCs in heavy nuclei are larger than previously believed.

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*Deceased.