Neutrinoless Double-β decay

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Observation of neutrinoless double-beta ($0\nu\beta\beta$) decay would signal violation of total lepton number conservation. The process can be mediated by an exchange of a light Majorana neutrino, or by an exchange of other particles. However, the existence of $0\nu\beta\beta$-decay requires a nonvanishing Majorana neutrino mass, no matter what the actual mechanism is. As long as only a limit on the lifetime is available, limits on the effective Majorana neutrino mass, on the lepton-number violating right-handed current or other possible mechanisms mediating $0\nu\beta\beta$ decay can be obtained, independently of the actual mechanism, by assuming that one of these "new physics" possibilities dominates. These limits are listed in the Double-β Decay Listings of the experimental measurements.

In the following we assume that the exchange of light Majorana neutrinos ($m_{\nu_i} \leq 10$ MeV) contributes dominantly to the decay rate. Besides a dependence on the phase space ($G^{0\nu}$) and the nuclear matrix element ($M^{0\nu}$), the observable $0\nu\beta\beta$-decay rate is proportional then to the square of the effective Majorana mass m_{ee}, $(T^{0\nu}_{1/2})^{-1} = G^{0\nu} \cdot |M^{0\nu}|^2 \cdot m^2_{ee}$, with $m^2_{ee} = |\sum_i U^2_{ei} m_{\nu_i}|^2$. The sum contains, in general, complex CP-phases in U^2_{ei}, i.e., cancellations may occur. For three neutrino flavors there are two physical phases for Majorana neutrinos (η_1, η_2) and one for Dirac neutrinos (δ_{CP}). The relevant Majorana phases affect only processes to which lepton-number changing amplitudes contribute. Given the general 3×3 mixing matrix for Majorana neutrinos, one can construct other analogous lepton number violating quantities, $m_{\ell\ell'} = \sum_i U_{\ell i} U_{\ell' i} m_{\nu_i} (\ell$ or $\ell' \neq e)$. However, these are currently much less constrained than m_{ee}.

Nuclear structure calculations are needed to deduce m_{ee} from the decay rate. While $G^{0\nu}$ can be calculated accurately, the computation of $M^{0\nu}$ is subject to uncertainty. Comparing different nuclear model evaluations indicates a factor ~2-3 spread in the calculated nuclear matrix elements. Nuclear structure calculation consistently overestimate Gamow-Teller (axial current) matrix elements. This inability of the nuclear models to reproduce Gamow-Teller decay rates is often parametrized in form of a modified coupling constant g_A. Many nuclear theorists interpret this shortcoming as evidence that important physics is missing in the modeling of weak nuclear transitions. It is not clear how these observed uncertainties impact $0\nu\beta\beta$-matrix elements. Nevertheless, this constitutes an additional element of uncertainty. Recent work, citeGysbers:2019uyb shows how the discrepancy between experimental and theoretical axial current matrix elements might be resolved. However, application of this approach to the $0\nu\beta\beta$ decay remains to be accomplished. The particle physics quantities to be determined are thus nuclear model-dependent, so the half-life measurements are listed first. Where possible, we reference the nuclear matrix elements used in the subsequent analysis. Since rates for the conventional $2\nu\beta\beta$ decay serve to constrain the nuclear theory models, results for this process are also given.

Oscillation experiments utilizing atmospheric, accelerator, solar, and reactor produced neutrinos and anti-neutrinos show that at least some neutrinos are massive. However, so far the inverted mass ordering (i.e., whether $\Delta m^2_{31} < 0$) is disfavored only by 2-3 σ compared to the normal mass ordering (when $\Delta m^2_{31} > 0$), while the absolute neutrino mass values or the properties of neutrinos under CPT-conjugation (Dirac or Majorana) remain undetermined. All confirmed oscillation experiments can be consistently described using three interacting neutrino species with two mass splittings and three mixing angles. (For values of the mixing angles and mass square differences see the corresponding tables.)

Based on the 3-neutrino analysis:
$m_{ee}^2 = |\cos^2\theta_{13}\cos^2\theta_{12}m_1 + e^{2i(\eta_2-\eta_1)}\cos^2\theta_{13}\sin^2\theta_{12}m_2 + e^{-2i(\eta_1+\delta_{CP})}\sin^2\theta_{13}m_3|^2$, valid for both mass orderings. Given the present knowledge of the neutrino oscillation parameters one can derive a relation between the effective Majorana mass and the mass of the lightest neutrino, as illustrated in Figure 14.11 in the Neutrino Masses, Mixing and Oscillations review. The three mass orderings allowed by the oscillation data: normal ($m_1 < m_2 \ll m_3$), inverted ($m_3 \ll m_1 < m_2$), and degenerate ($m_1 \approx m_2 \approx m_3$), result in different projections. The width of the colored bands reflects the uncertainty introduced by the unknown Majorana and Dirac phases as well as the experimental errors of the oscillation parameters. The latter causes only minor broadening of the bands. Because of the overlap of the different mass scenarios, a measurement of m_{ee} would not reveal which mass ordering is applicable, provided the value of m_{ee} is in the overlapping range.

Analogous plots depict the relation of m_{ee} with the summed neutrino mass $m_{tot} = m_1 + m_2 + m_3$, constrained by observational cosmology, and m_{ee} as a function of the average mass $m_{\nu_e}^{eff} = [\Sigma|U_{ei}|^2 m_{\nu_i}^2]^{1/2}$ determined through the analysis of the electron energy distribution in low energy beta decays. (See Fig. 1 of [2].) The oscillation data thus allow to test whether observed values of m_{ee} and m_{tot} or $m_{\nu_e}^{eff}$ are consistent within the 3 neutrino framework. The rather large intrinsic width of the $\beta\beta$-decay constraints essentially does not allow to positively identify the mass ordering, and thus the sign of Δm_{31}^2, even in combination with these other observables. Naturally, if a value of $0 < m_{ee} \leq 0.01$ eV is ever established, then the normal mass ordering becomes the only possible scenario.

It should be noted that systematic uncertainties of the nuclear matrix elements and possible quenching of the axial current matrix elements are sometimes not folded into the mass limits reported by $\beta\beta$-decay experiments. Taking this additional uncertainty into account would further widen the projections. The plots are based on a 3-neutrino analysis. If it turns out that additional, i.e. sterile light neutrinos exist, the allowed regions would be modified substantially.

If neutrinoless double-beta decay is observed, it will be possible to fix a range of absolute values of the masses m_{ν_i}. Unlike the direct neutrino mass measurements, however, a limit on m_{ee} does not allow one to constrain the individual mass values m_{ν_i} even when the mass differences Δm_{ij}^2 are known.

Neutrino oscillation data imply the existence of a lower limit ~ 0.014 eV for the Majorana neutrino mass for the inverted mass ordering pattern, while m_{ee} could, by fine tuning, vanish in the case of the normal mass ordering. Several new double-beta searches have been proposed to probe the interesting m_{ee} mass range, with the prospect of full coverage of the inverted mass ordering region within the next decade.

The $0\nu\beta\beta$ decay mechanism discussed so far is not the only way in which the decay can occur. Numerous other possible scenarios have been proposed, however, all of them requiring new physics. It will be a challenging task to decide which mechanism was responsible once $0\nu\beta\beta$ decay is observed. LHC experiments may reveal corresponding signatures for new physics of lepton number violation. If lepton-number violating right-handed weak current interactions exist, its strength can be characterized by the phenomenological coupling constants η and λ (η describes the coupling between the right-handed lepton current and left-handed quark current while λ describes the coupling when both currents are right-handed). The $0\nu\beta\beta$ decay rate then depends on $\langle\eta\rangle = \eta\sum_i U_{ei}V_{ei}$ and $\langle\lambda\rangle = \lambda\sum_i U_{ei}V_{ei}$ that vanish for massless or unmixed neutrinos ($V_{\ell j}$ is a matrix analogous to $U_{\ell j}$ but describing the mixing with the hypothetical right-handed neutrinos). The observation of the single electron spectra could, in principle, allow to distinguish this mechanism of $0\nu\beta\beta$ from the light Majorana neutrino exchange driven mode. The limits on $\langle\eta\rangle$ and $\langle\lambda\rangle$ are listed in a separate table. The reader is cautioned that a number of earlier experiments did not distinguish between η and λ. In addition, see the section on Majoron searches for additional limits set by these experiments.

References:

1. P. Gysbers *et al.*, Nature Phys. **15**, 5 (2019); [arXiv:1903.00047].
2. M.J. Dolinski, A.W.P. Poon and W. Rodejohann, Ann. Rev. Nucl. Part. Sci. **49**, 219 (2019); [arXiv:1902.04097].