



Measurement of the prompt D^0 nuclear modification factor in $p\text{Pb}$ collisions at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 8.16 \text{ TeV}$

LHCb collaboration[†]

Abstract

The production of prompt D^0 mesons in proton-lead collisions in both the forward and backward rapidity regions at a center-of-mass energy per nucleon pair of $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 8.16 \text{ TeV}$ is measured by the LHCb experiment. The nuclear modification factor of prompt D^0 mesons is determined as a function of the transverse momentum p_{T} , and the rapidity in the nucleon-nucleon center-of-mass frame y^* . In the forward rapidity region, significantly suppressed production with respect to pp collisions is measured, which provides significant constraints on models of nuclear parton distributions and hadron production down to the very low Bjorken- x region of $\sim 10^{-5}$. In the backward rapidity region, a suppression with a significance of $2.0 - 3.8$ standard deviations compared to nPDF expectations is found in the kinematic region of $p_{\text{T}} > 6 \text{ GeV}/c$ and $-3.25 < y^* < -2.5$, corresponding to $x \sim 0.01$.

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Charm and beauty quarks are produced in the early stage of ultra-relativistic heavy-ion collisions and are strongly affected by the presence of deconfined hot nuclear matter, known as quark-gluon plasma (QGP) [1], as well as by cold nuclear matter (CNM) effects. The latter can be studied in proton-nucleus collisions where QGP effects are not expected to be dominant. Heavy-flavor hadrons, *i.e.* hadrons containing one or more heavy quark, are affected by CNM effects at all stages of their production. At LHC energies, the most relevant effect is from the initial state, where the parton distribution functions in a nuclear environment (nPDF) [2–4] differ from those in isolated nucleons at all values of Bjorken momentum fraction x . Parton density decreases at $x \lesssim 0.1$ due to nuclear shadowing, and increases at $0.1 \lesssim x \lesssim 0.3$ as a result of antishadowing [5]. Therefore different effects are expected to be relevant at different intervals of rapidity, which is strongly correlated with x . The parton distributions at small x can also be described by the color-glass condensate effective theory (CGC) as a saturated gluonic system [6]. Moreover, multiple scattering and energy loss may occur when the incoming partons and the heavy quarks traverse the nuclear medium [7–9]. Other initial-state or even final-state effects [10, 11] may also modify the kinematic distributions of produced heavy-flavor hadrons, as suggested by their surprisingly large spatial anisotropy in momentum in high-multiplicity p Pb collisions [12, 13].

The LHCb collaboration has recently measured the production cross-section of various heavy-flavor hadrons in p Pb collisions at forward rapidity, including the production of prompt D^0 and Λ_c^+ hadrons at a center-of-mass energy per nucleon pair of $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 5.02$ TeV [14, 15], and the production of J/ψ , B^0 , B^+ , A_b^0 and $\Upsilon(nS)$ states at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 8.16$ TeV [16–18]. The ALICE collaboration has measured open charm production at midrapidity at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 5.02$ TeV [19–24]. Other measurements of heavy-flavor production in p Pb collisions at the LHC are also reported [25–36]. CNM effects have also been investigated with heavy-quark production at the RHIC collider in d Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 200$ GeV [37, 38]. These measurements have led to significantly reduced uncertainties of nPDFs in the small- x region [39, 40], especially with the constraints from the LHCb D^0 measurements at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 5.02$ TeV [14].

This Letter reports the measurement of the production cross-section and the nuclear modification factor $R_{p\text{Pb}}$ of prompt D^0 mesons in p Pb collisions at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 8.16$ TeV performed with the LHCb detector [41]. The quantity $R_{p\text{Pb}}$ is defined as the ratio of the cross-section in p Pb collisions to the corresponding cross-section in pp collisions scaled by the mass number of Pb. Prompt mesons are those directly produced in proton-lead collisions or from strong decays of excited charm hadrons, rather than from decays of beauty hadrons. This measurement uses a data sample 20 times larger than that used for the LHCb D^0 measurements at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 5.02$ TeV [14]. The results can be incorporated into global fits together with all other relevant measurements to improve nPDF parameterizations and to test other possible CNM effects.

The LHCb detector is a single-arm forward spectrometer designed for studying heavy-flavor particles, described in detail in Refs. [41, 42]. The data sample for this analysis consists of p Pb collisions collected with the LHCb detector at the end of 2016, including two different configurations: forward collisions (p beam coming from upstream of the vertex detector) and backward collisions (p beam coming from downstream of the vertex detector), corresponding to an integrated luminosity of $12.2 \pm 0.3 \text{ nb}^{-1}$ ($18.6 \pm 0.5 \text{ nb}^{-1}$) for forward (backward) collisions [17, 43]. The forward (backward) configuration data cover a positive (negative) rapidity range of $1.5 < y^* < 4.0$ ($-5.0 < y^* < -2.5$), corresponding

to an x coverage of approximately $10^{-5} - 10^{-3}$ ($10^{-2} - 10^{-1}$) for the partons of the Pb nucleus, with the positive z -axis defined as the direction of the proton beam.

Simulation samples are required to model the effects of the detector acceptance and the selection requirements. The D^0 mesons are generated using PYTHIA 8 [44] with a specific LHCb configuration [46] and embedded into minimum-bias p Pb events from the EPOS-LHC generator [45]. Decays of unstable particles are described by EVTGEN [47], in which final-state radiation is generated using PHOTOS [48]. The interaction of the generated particles with the detector, and its response, are implemented using the GEANT4 toolkit [49] as described in Ref. [50].

The double differential cross-section for prompt D^0 production is measured as a function of y^* , the rapidity in the nucleon-nucleon center-of-mass frame, and p_T , the transverse momentum with respect to the beam direction. The quantity y^* is related to the rapidity in the laboratory frame y_{lab} by $y^* = y_{\text{lab}} - 0.465$ for p Pb collisions. The differential cross-section in a given (p_T, y^*) interval is defined as

$$\frac{d^2\sigma}{dp_T dy^*} \equiv \frac{N(D^0 \rightarrow K^\mp \pi^\pm) + N(\bar{D}^0 \rightarrow K^\pm \pi^\mp)}{\mathcal{L} \times \varepsilon_{\text{tot}} \times \mathcal{B}(D^0 \rightarrow K^\mp \pi^\pm) \times \Delta p_T \times \Delta y^*}, \quad (1)$$

where $N(D^0 \rightarrow K^\mp \pi^\pm)$ and $N(\bar{D}^0 \rightarrow K^\pm \pi^\mp)$ are the D^0 and $\bar{D}^0$ signal yields, $\mathcal{L}$ is the integrated luminosity, ε_{tot} is the total efficiency, $\mathcal{B}(D^0 \rightarrow K^\mp \pi^\pm) = (3.96 \pm 0.03)\%$ is the sum of branching fractions for the decays $D^0 \rightarrow K^- \pi^+$ and $D^0 \rightarrow K^+ \pi^-$ [51], and Δp_T and Δy^* are the p_T and y^* interval widths. The D^0 mesons are reconstructed through the $D^0 \rightarrow K^- \pi^+$ and the doubly Cabibbo-suppressed $D^0 \rightarrow K^+ \pi^-$ decay channels and their charge conjugates¹. The measurement is performed within a p_T range of $0 < p_T < 30 \text{ GeV}/c$, and the rapidity range defined above. Throughout the analysis, the measurements are for the combined sample of D^0 and $\bar{D}^0$ mesons. The signal yields and the total efficiency are determined in each kinematic interval.

The D^0 candidates are built from $K^\mp$ and $\pi^\pm$ candidate tracks. The selection criteria are similar to those used in D^0 production measurements in p Pb collisions at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 5.02 \text{ TeV}$ [14]. The reconstructed $K^\mp$ and $\pi^\pm$ tracks are required to have transverse momentum greater than $0.4 \text{ GeV}/c$. Both tracks are also required to be of good quality, come from a common vertex, and pass particle identification (PID) requirements.

The inclusive D^0 signal yield is the sum of the prompt D^0 mesons and those produced in the decays of b hadrons, denoted “*from-b*”. This inclusive yield is determined using an extended unbinned maximum-likelihood fit to the distribution of the $K\pi$ invariant mass, $M(K\pi)$. The $M(K\pi)$ distribution of the signal is described by a sum of a Crystal Ball function [52] and a Gaussian function sharing a common mean value, while the background shape is described by a linear function, following the measurement of Ref. [14]. The prompt signal yield is determined by fitting the distribution of $\log_{10}(\chi_{\text{IP}}^2)$ of the D^0 candidates, where χ_{IP}^2 is defined as the difference in the vertex-fit χ^2 of a given primary vertex reconstructed with and without the D^0 candidate under consideration. The background component in the $\log_{10}(\chi_{\text{IP}}^2)$ distribution is subtracted using the *sPlot* technique [53] with $M(K\pi)$ as the discriminating variable. The shapes of the $\log_{10}(\chi_{\text{IP}}^2)$ distribution corresponding to the prompt and *from-b* components are described independently by Bukin functions [54], which are asymmetric functions with tails described by Gaussian

¹The branching fraction of $D^0 \rightarrow K^+ \pi^-$ channel is two orders of magnitude smaller than that of $D^0 \rightarrow K^- \pi^+$.

functions. The parameters of the functions describing the prompt and *from-b* components are fixed to those from simulation. The invariant-mass and $\log_{10}(\chi^2_{\text{IP}})$ distributions of the forward and backward samples are given in the Supplemental Material [55].

The total efficiency ε_{tot} is the product of the geometrical acceptance of the detector, the selection and reconstruction efficiency, the PID efficiency and the trigger efficiency, with each component determined separately. The geometrical acceptance, and the selection, reconstruction and trigger efficiencies are evaluated with the *pPb* simulation samples. The simulation sample is weighted in order to match the occupancy of the tracking system observed in the data. The track reconstruction efficiency is calibrated with minimum-bias $J/\psi \rightarrow \mu^+\mu^-$ and $K_S^0 \rightarrow \pi^+\pi^-$ samples, using the tag-and-probe approach employed in Ref. [56]. The trigger efficiency obtained from the simulation is validated by measuring it from control data samples recorded with minimum trigger requirements. The PID efficiency is estimated with a tag-and-probe method [57, 58], using the D^{*+} -tagged decay chain $D^{*+} \rightarrow D^0\pi^+$ with $D^0 \rightarrow K^-\pi^+$ decays.

Several sources of systematic uncertainty are considered and described in detail in the Supplemental Material [55], where results and numerical values for the double-differential cross-section are also given. The total prompt D^0 production cross-section, obtained by integrating the double-differential measurements, is $297.6 \pm 0.6 \pm 14.0$ mb in the kinematic range of $0 < p_T < 30$ GeV/*c* and $1.5 < y^* < 4.0$ for the forward rapidity region, and $315.2 \pm 0.2 \pm 17.8$ mb in the kinematic range of $0 < p_T < 30$ GeV/*c* and $-5.0 < y^* < -2.5$ in the backward rapidity region. The first uncertainties are statistical and the second systematic.

The nuclear modification factor $R_{p\text{Pb}}$ is defined as

$$R_{p\text{Pb}}(p_T, y^*) \equiv \frac{1}{A} \frac{d^2\sigma_{p\text{Pb}}(p_T, y^*)/(dp_T dy^*)}{d^2\sigma_{pp}(p_T, y^*)/(dp_T dy^*)}, \quad (2)$$

where $A = 208$ is the mass number of the lead nucleus and σ_{pp} is the prompt D^0 production cross-section in *pp* collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 8.16$ TeV. An interpolation between LHCb measurements at $\sqrt{s} = 5.02$ TeV and $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV [59, 60] is performed to obtain $d^2\sigma_{pp}(p_T, y^*)/(dp_T dy^*)$, using a power-law function $\sigma(\sqrt{s}) = p_0 (\sqrt{s})^{p_1}$. A linear function is also considered. The interpolation uncertainty comprises the difference between the two interpolation models, and the propagated total uncertainties from the *pp* measurements, and typically amounts to 3% (5%) at forward (backward) rapidity. The interpolation is performed within the common measured kinematic range of $p_T < 10$ GeV/*c* and $2.0 < y < 4.5$ for 5.02 and 13 TeV *pp* results, hence $R_{p\text{Pb}}$ is measured in that range.

The nuclear modification factor of the D^0 meson as a function of p_T is displayed in Fig. 1, where 8 panels report the results in different y^* subintervals of $\Delta y^* = 0.5$ and the two left panels are in the common range between the forward and backward rapidity coverage, $2.5 < |y^*| < 4$. Figures showing $R_{p\text{Pb}}$ and the forward-backward production ratio R_{FB} as functions of y^* and p_T in $\Delta y^* = 0.25$ intervals, as well as the numerical values are given in the Supplemental Material [55]. A significant suppression of the cross-section in *pPb* collisions, with respect to that in *pp* collisions scaled by the lead mass number, is observed at forward rapidity as well as at backward rapidity up to $y^* \sim -3.5$.

The $R_{p\text{Pb}}$ results are compared with several theoretical calculations. The HELAC-Onia approach [62, 63] is based on a data-driven modeling of the scattering at partonic level folded with the free proton PDFs [66]. The calculations are first tuned by fitting the cross-sections measured in *pp* collisions at the LHC. Then, the modified PDFs of

nucleons in the Pb nucleus are introduced in the model to calculate the cross-sections in $p\text{Pb}$ collisions and to estimate the effect of nPDFs, neglecting other cold and hot nuclear matter effects. Reweighted EPPS16 [64] and nCTEQ15 [65] nPDF sets, where LHC heavy flavor data [14, 19–21] are incorporated by performing a Bayesian-reweighting analysis [61], are used in the calculations, resulting in considerably reduced uncertainties than calculations using the default nPDFs. The uncertainties are dominated by nPDF parameterizations and correspond to a 68% confidence interval. At forward rapidity, the calculations are in general agreement with the data, except for $p_T < 1\text{ GeV}/c$ where the predictions are about 2 standard deviations larger than the data. This discrepancy suggests stronger shadowing or additional energy loss at low x . At backward rapidity, for $p_T > 6\text{ GeV}/c$ and $-3.5 < y^* < -2.5$ the data are lower than the calculations by 2.0 – 3.8 standard deviations, indicating a weaker antishadowing effect or possible final-state effects.

The nuclear modification factor is also compared with two calculations based on the CGC effective field theory, CGC1 and CGC2. Since gluon saturation is expected to occur at small x and Q^2 , the calculations are applicable for $p_T < 5\text{ GeV}/c$ at forward rapidity where saturation effects are relevant. For CGC1 [67, 68] the D -meson production is calculated with the color dipole formalism, and the optical Glauber model is used to relate the initial condition of a nucleus to that of the proton. For CGC2 [69] the color dipole approach is combined with a heavy-quark fragmentation function to calculate the cross-sections. The CGC1 predictions have much smaller uncertainties than the CGC2 ones, because the CGC1 uncertainties include only variations of the c quark mass and of the factorization scale, which largely cancel out in the $R_{p\text{Pb}}$ ratio versus p_T . CGC1 is consistent with the upper bound of CGC2 and is slightly higher than the data. CGC2 shows a stronger suppression than HELAC-Onia calculations and gives a better description of the data, especially for $p_T < 3\text{ GeV}/c$.

A fourth calculation estimates D^0 suppression caused by medium-induced fully coherent energy loss (FCEL) [9], a CNM effect where the interference between initial- and final-state gluon radiation results in an energy loss proportional to the incoming parton energy. The FCEL prediction shown in Fig. 1 does not consider the modification of nPDFs. The effect is significant for low p_T , suggesting the suppression observed for $p_T < 1\text{ GeV}/c$ may be caused by combined effects from nPDFs and FCEL. For $p_T > 6\text{ GeV}/c$ the suppression due to FCEL is negligible, thus the discrepancy between the data and HELAC-Onia calculations with nPDFs at backward rapidity cannot be attributed to FCEL effects.

The results are also compared with the LHCb D^0 measurement at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 5.02\text{ TeV}$ [14]. At forward rapidity the $R_{p\text{Pb}}$ values at the two energies are compatible, while at backward rapidity the 8.16 TeV data are significantly lower. The difference could be related to the different Bjorken- x coverage at the two collision energies, while effects related to the Pb-going hemisphere other than nPDFs and FCEL, such as final-state energy loss in a high-particle-density environment, may also show a $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}}$ dependence as more charged hadrons are produced in 8.16 TeV collisions. On the other hand, the model calculations offer limited insights into collision energy dependence. HELAC-Onia predictions based on nPDFs are compatible between the two $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}}$ values due to the large uncertainty of the nPDFs used in the 5.02 TeV calculation. The CGC models show similar values at 5.02 and 8.16 TeV at forward rapidity while they are not applicable at backward. Effects due to FCEL are generally small at backward rapidity.

It is essential to study the impact of Bjorken- x coverage in order to interpret the energy dependence observed in the data. However, x and the momentum transfer Q^2 [5]

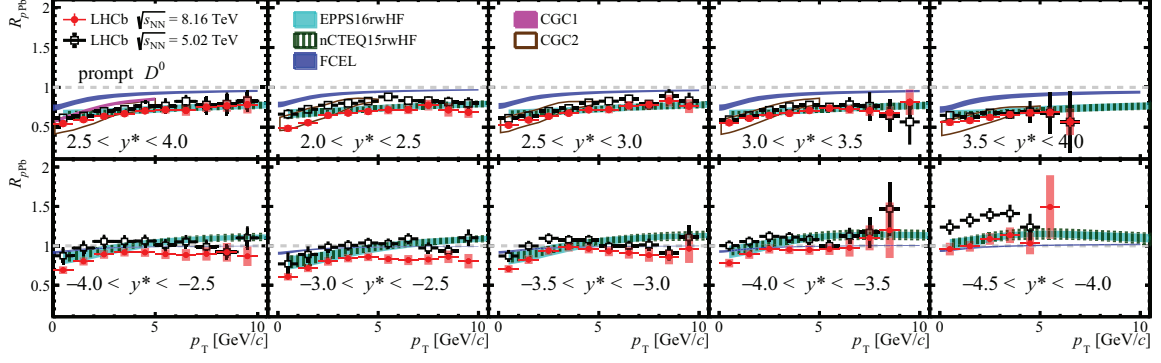


Figure 1: Nuclear modification factor as a function of p_T in different y^* intervals for prompt D^0 mesons in the (top) forward and (bottom) backward regions. The error bars show the statistical uncertainties and the boxes show the systematic uncertainties. The LHCb results at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 5.02$ TeV [14] and theoretical calculations at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 8.16$ TeV from Refs. [9, 64, 65, 68, 69] are also shown. For LHCb results at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 5.02$ TeV, the error bars show the quadric sum of statistical and systematic uncertainties.

are partonic quantities that cannot be directly measured in hadronic collisions. Instead, experimental proxies x_{exp} and Q_{exp}^2 , defined as

$$x_{\text{exp}} \equiv 2 \frac{\sqrt{p_T^2(D^0) + M^2(D^0)}}{\sqrt{s_{NN}}} e^{-y^*} \text{ and } Q_{\text{exp}}^2 \equiv p_T^2(D^0) + M^2(D^0), \quad (3)$$

are introduced to approximate the variation of R_{pPb} with x and Q^2 , where $M(D^0)$ and $p_T(D^0)$ denote the mass and p_T of D^0 mesons, respectively.

Figure 2 shows R_{pPb} as a function of x_{exp} in five Q_{exp}^2 intervals, for D^0 mesons measured in this work at 8.16 TeV, and at 5.02 TeV from Ref. [14]. The x_{exp} coverage of the 8.16 TeV data extends lower than that of the 5.02 TeV measurements due to the higher $\sqrt{s_{NN}}$ value, reaching down to $x_{\text{exp}} \sim 10^{-5}$ in the interval $3.48 < Q_{\text{exp}}^2 < 7.48$ GeV², which corresponds to $p_T < 2$ GeV/c. The 8.16 TeV data are also more precise. Data from the two energies are in good agreement with each other at common x_{exp} values. The measurements form a consistent trend from the small x_{exp} region corresponding to forward rapidity to the large x_{exp} region corresponding to backward rapidity, for all Q_{exp}^2 intervals. The D^0 R_{pPb} ratio at 5.02 TeV at midrapidity [22] measured by the ALICE collaboration is also added to Fig. 2, and is compatible with the trend within uncertainties. The trend suggests that the $\sqrt{s_{NN}}$ dependence observed at backward rapidity in Fig. 1 arises from different x coverage in a kinematic region where R_{pPb} depends strongly on x .

The HELAC-Onia predictions are also transformed according to Eq. 3 and shown in Fig. 2. In the small x_{exp} region, the calculations are in general agreement with the data, except for the interval $3.48 < Q_{\text{exp}}^2 < 7.48$ GeV² ($p_T < 2$ GeV/c) and $10^{-5} < x_{\text{exp}} < 10^{-4}$, where the nPDF expectations are slightly larger than the data and show greater uncertainty. The data hint at a stronger shadowing effect, or other possible effects such as FCEL, that suppresses low- p_T D^0 production at forward rapidity. Moreover, estimations from Ref. [70] suggest gluon saturation may occur in this region. At backward rapidity, the R_{pPb} values from the model are larger than those in the data for $Q_{\text{exp}}^2 > 19.48$ GeV² ($p_T > 4$ GeV/c) and $10^{-2} < x_{\text{exp}} < 10^{-1}$, indicating smaller antishadowing effects in the data if nuclear

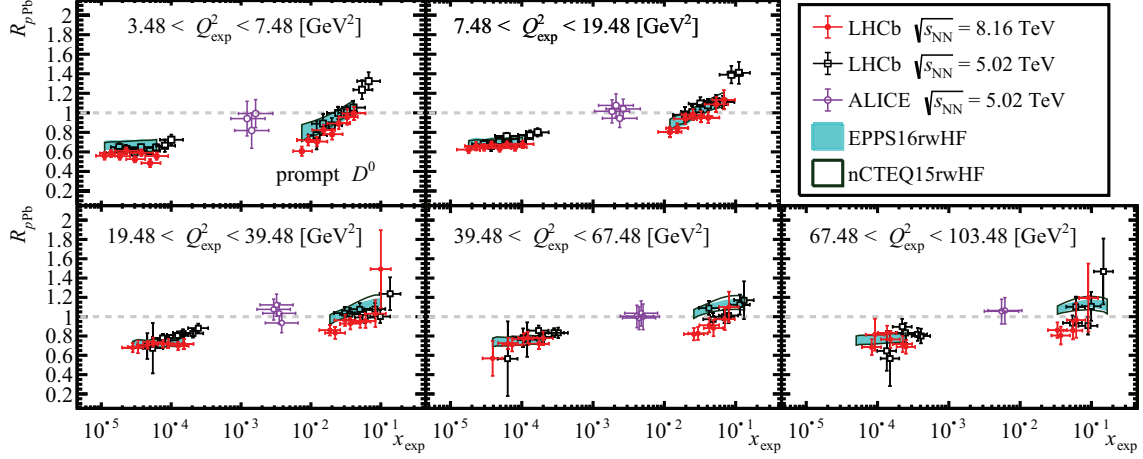


Figure 2: Nuclear modification factor as a function of x_{exp} in different Q_{exp}^2 intervals for prompt D^0 mesons for LHCb results at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 8.16$ TeV and $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 5.02$ [14] and the ALICE result at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 5.02$ TeV [22]. Theoretical calculations at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 8.16$ TeV from Refs. [64, 65] are also shown. The horizontal error bars account for the maximum and minimum x_{exp} values for a given (p_{T}, y^*) interval and the vertical error bars show the quadric sum of statistical and systematic uncertainties.

effects other than nPDFs are negligible. Alternatively it suggests additional suppression mechanisms, such as final-state energy loss, may occur at backward rapidity.

In summary, the prompt D^0 production cross-section is measured at the LHCb experiment in proton-lead collisions at $\sqrt{s_{\text{NN}}} = 8.16$ TeV, at both forward and backward rapidities. The nuclear modification factors are measured with high accuracy and show strong cold nuclear matter effects. A stronger suppression than the predictions of nPDF calculations is observed for the lowest transverse momentum region of $p_{\text{T}} < 1$ GeV/c at forward rapidity, hinting at a stronger shadowing than predicted at Bjorken- $x \sim 10^{-5}$, or additional effects at play. For the backward rapidity range of $-3.5 < y^* < -2.5$, the $R_{p\text{Pb}}$ values are lower than nPDF calculations at $p_{\text{T}} > 6$ GeV/c with a significance of $2.0 - 3.8$ standard deviations, indicating a weaker antishadowing effect than the model or additional final-state effects at backward rapidity. This Letter presents the most precise measurement of the prompt D^0 production in pPb collisions to date, providing unique constraints to improve nPDF parameterization down to $x \sim 10^{-5}$.

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