



Phases of Nuclear Matter

Nuclear matter can exist in several phases. When collisions excite nuclei, individual protons and neutrons may evaporate from the nuclear fluid. At sufficiently high temperature or density, a gas of nucleons (red background) forms. At even more extreme conditions, individual nucleons may cease to have meaningful identities, merging into the quark-gluon plasma (yellow background). Current data provide hints that physicists have glimpsed the quark-gluon plasma.