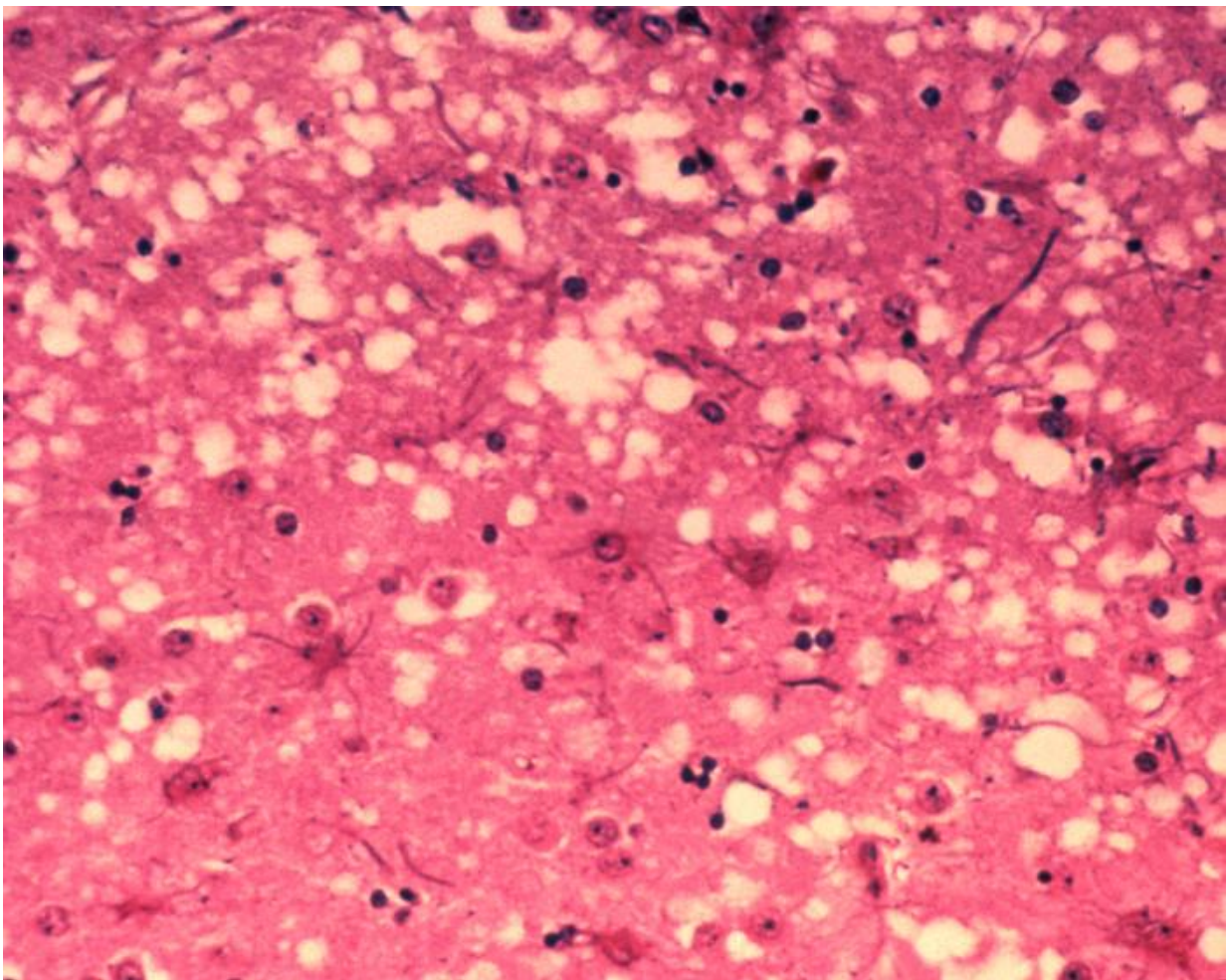


# Brain disorder with symptoms including hallucinations and memory loss has Canadian doctors baffled

April 1 2021, by Brian Niemietz

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This micrograph of brain tissue reveals the cytoarchitectural histopathologic changes found in bovine spongiform encephalopathy. The presence of vacuoles, i.e. microscopic “holes” in the gray matter, gives the brain of BSE-affected cows

a sponge-like appearance when tissue sections are examined in the lab. Credit: Dr. Al Jenny - Public Health Image Library, APHIS: Public domain

A "cluster" of patients experiencing hallucinations and memory loss has doctors in northeast Canada concerned that they're seeing a new kind of brain disease.

*The Guardian* reports that for over the course of more than a year, [public health officials](#) in New Brunswick have encountered 43 cases of suspected neurological disorders with no known cause. Officials have told the public not to panic over the smattering of cases, though politicians are pressuring the [medical community](#) for answers.

A leaked memo last week from province officials reportedly asked medical workers to report symptoms like those associated with the rare and deadly Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, which is thought to be a prion disease. Johns Hopkins University defines a prion as "a type of protein that can trigger normal proteins in the brain to fold abnormally."

Such diseases are said to affect humans and animals and can spread to people through infected meat products.

Neurologist Dr. Alier Marrero, who is leading the New Brunswick investigation, told *The Guardian* there is no reason so far to believe what his team is seeing now is a prion disease.

While researchers are exploring whether or not they're looking at a neurological mystery, Marrero says some symptoms listed by patients early on were consistent with anxiety and depression. But further observation reportedly revealed [cognitive decline](#), drooling and teeth chattering, with some patients experiencing hallucinatory sensations akin

to bugs crawling on skin.

University of Alberta researcher Valerie Sim told *The Guardian* there isn't yet enough information for medical experts to know what these recent cases indicate.

"We see odd neurological syndromes from time to time," Sim said.  
"Sometimes we figure them out. Sometimes we don't."

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