Experiment Tests Ticks' Resiliency

Dogs, beware! Many ticks can survive a washing machine cycle, experiment shows.

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Adult deer tick/Courtesy of Scott Bauer Itching, redness, and discomfort are just a few of the symptoms caused when ticks latch on to dogs. And now new research shows just how difficult these parasites are to exterminate.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS) entomologist John Carroll conducted an experiment on ticks' resilience after finding a live lone star tick in his washing machine. Carroll collected two tick species – the lone star tick and the deer tick – then put them in mesh bags and dropped them in the washing machine, according to the ARS.

The researcher tested a combination of water temperatures (cold, warm, and hot) and detergent types. The majority of the lone star ticks survived all detergent and water temperature combinations. Deer ticks survived the majority of the cold and warm water combinations, but only about 25 percent survived the hot water setting when washed with a detergent.

Carroll then threw the ticks in the dryer. All of the ticks died after an hour of drying on high heat. When no heat was used, about 33 percent of deer ticks and over half of lone star ticks survived the dryer.

The mesh bags may have increased the ticks' odds for survival, preventing them from washing away. However, ticks may find shelter from the wash on their own by hiding in folds of clothes, the ARS reported.

The ARS conducts scientific research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

To prevent tick bites and possible disease transmission, dogs should be treated with tick preventives, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association. Veterinarians can recommend appropriate treatments that are tailored to each pet's needs.