

5 years ago

#Science in Photos

#cockroaches

#science

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#disease



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Cockroach Reproach

Just about the only admiring thing folks say about the [cockroach](#) is that it will likely outlive us all, particularly post-nuclear apocalypse. They are extraordinarily hard to kill. To wit: [a 2016 study](#) looked at what happens to the insect when various weights up to 100 grams were placed on their bodies. That's nearly 900 times their body weight. Result: Nothing. The cockroach's [protective exoskeleton](#) prevented injury.

Humans kill cockroaches because they are perceived to be vectors of disease. But while it's indisputable that their habit of feeding on human excrement and other nasty stuff, then transferring or excreting associated pathogens is a proven health risk, it turns out, according to a new review by the [World Health Organization](#), that there is no definitive evidence that cockroaches are direct vectors for human disease.

In other words, like houseflies, they play a supplementary role, which may be small consolation when you've got dysentery caused by an amoeba transported from one place to your place by a cockroach.

One exception, however, could be asthma caused by an allergy to cockroaches themselves, reports *The New York Times*, [citing a 2005 study](#) that found that children living in poorer urban areas of the U.S. were at greater risk of asthmatic illness from cockroach allergy than from allergies to dogs or cat dander or [dust mite excretions](#).

– *Scott LaFee*

Pictured: A common German cockroach (*Blattella germanica*) rolls over to play. Or it may be dead.

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