

Lead poisoning? And psychological effects?

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I'm wondering about exposure to lead when I was a child and what effect it may have had on me. When I was 9 years old, my parents moved into a very dilapidated 90-year old house with the intention of renovating it. They first repainted the exterior, which was peeling and flaking. I was enlisted in the task of helping to scrape off the old paint, which was very thick and "alligatored". I remember the dust and flakes being pretty bad and getting into my nose and mouth. On the interior, they attempted to remove the decades of paint from the woodwork, with a combination of scraping and melting it off. I helped out with the scraping here as well, and it did create quite a bit of dust and flakes. The melting also produced a fair amount of nasty fumes. We were living in the house while all this was going on. This whole period of renovation lasted about 2 years, on and off.

I'm fairly sure this kind of thing would cause some kind of lead exposure. I'm wondering how much, and what kinds of effects it would have had. Shortly after this period I developed some rather alarming mental problems, mainly of a paranoid nature. For example, I began to imagine that people were trying to poison me, or that I had some obscure illness, and I became afraid of anyone outside my family. In the past I've tended to blame such things on the abuse I received from the other neighborhood kids (it was a slightly violent neighborhood), but I wonder what role lead might have played. My brother who was a year younger than me also developed psychological problems around this time.

Any effects on intelligence would be a bit hard to determine. I was considered precocious when I was younger, and I still got very good grades in college, but I have long had a hard time concentrating or thinking clearly and I'm considered notoriously thickheaded at work. The lead exposure does coincide roughly with when I started having some difficulty with math, but that could just be coincidence.