

Printed on page BN1

Swine flu is a killer once more

By [Anna Scott](#)

Published: Thursday, September 17, 2009 at 1:00 a.m.

Cheryl Ann McCabe and her boyfriend both had mental health problems and often felt like outsiders in the world before finding each other in middle age.

They wanted to get married but their plans were cut short, and health officials suspect the H1N1 swine flu virus was the culprit.

McCabe's mother found her daughter dead in her bedroom about two weeks ago. Charlotte health officials announced Wednesday that she had been infected with the H1N1 virus.

At the time of her death, McCabe, 47, was mourning the sudden loss of her boyfriend, Raymond Bei. He died in the couple's Punta Gorda apartment from what appeared to be a problem related to a blood clot, just three days before McCabe's own death. McCabe found him unresponsive on the couch and called the police.

Bei, 42, had had a cold, said McCabe's mother, Barbara Edwards of Port Charlotte. But he was never checked for the swine flu virus, she said.

"We'll never know what he died of, if it was the flu," said Bob Carpenter, information officer with the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, which investigated the deaths. "It's too late. The body is gone."

McCabe appeared to come down with a cold, too, around the same time that her boyfriend died. She was flushed, out of breath, and feverish, Edwards said. She went to her doctor and began a regimen of Tamiflu, the antiviral prescribed to combat swine flu. Being overweight, McCabe was at extra risk of dying from the virus.

The day after McCabe began the medication, on Sept. 1, Edwards stopped by her daughter's house, found her in bed and thought she was asleep. When she tried to wake her, she discovered her daughter was dead. Knowing that her boyfriend had died days earlier, at first people guessed that McCabe had intentionally overdosed on drugs to kill herself, Edwards said.

"I was in shock, first one and then the other," Edwards said.

The two "felt out of place" because of their mental illnesses, Edwards said, but had found happiness together and seemed to help each other progress.

In the dozen years since McCabe was diagnosed with a form of schizophrenia, Edwards believed she no longer had to worry about her daughter so much.

McCabe and her boyfriend liked to visit parks and beaches and hung out together at the same center for the mentally ill in Charlotte County.

"Ray was her buddy, and they went every place together," Edwards said in a phone interview. "They had each other. They were starting a life of their own finally. You didn't have to worry about them as much because they were taking care of each other."