1. While grazing horses ingest infected forage mites. These mites contain the intermediate cysticercoid stages, which are cysts containing the head (scolex) of the future adult tapeworm.

2. After ingesting an infected mite the cyst is digested freeing the scolex that attaches to the intestinal mucosa using its four suckers. The predilection site of Anoplocephala perfoliata is at the ileocaecal junction. Following attachment a chain of segments (proglottids) begins to grow from the base of the scolex. Each segment contains both male and female reproductive organs. While a segment shifts posteriorly it matures and becomes filled with numerous eggs. As soon as a segment is packed with eggs it is called ripe or gravid. Adult tapeworms survive from several months to a few years.

3. Gravid segments break off at the posterior end of the tapeworm. These segments already may break up while still in the intestinal tract or may be shed intact with the faeces. The interval between ingesting an infected mite and the subsequent first appearance of eggs or proglottids in the faeces is called prepatent period and is 6-10 weeks.

4. After being excreted with the faeces, either loose or within a proglottid, eggs are immediately infective for forage mites. There is no further development in the environment. Eggs are thick-walled and consequently may survive up to 4 months on pasture.

NB. The lifecycle is indirect, which means that the lifecycle contains an obligatory intermediate host. In this case the intermediate hosts are forage mites (family Oribatidae) that are present in large numbers on pastures helping to breakdown organic matter. The tapeworm eggs are ingested by these mites after which the cysticercoid stage develops. This development in the mite takes about 2-4 months. The cysticercoid stage is infective for the definitive host, the horse.

5. Infected mites walk around in the vegetation on pastures. If it is very hot and dry or very cold mites concentrate close to the ground or even hide below the surface. If it is warm and moist mites become more active above ground and even climb onto grass leaves, which makes them more readily ingested by horses. Development from egg to adult mite takes ca. 5 months up to 1 year. Adult mites may survive 1-2 years. This implies that the cysticercoid stage of tapeworms can survive for a long time in the adult intermediate host.